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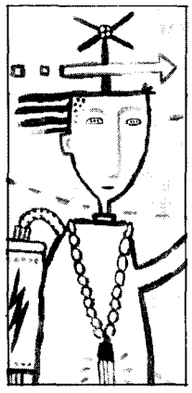

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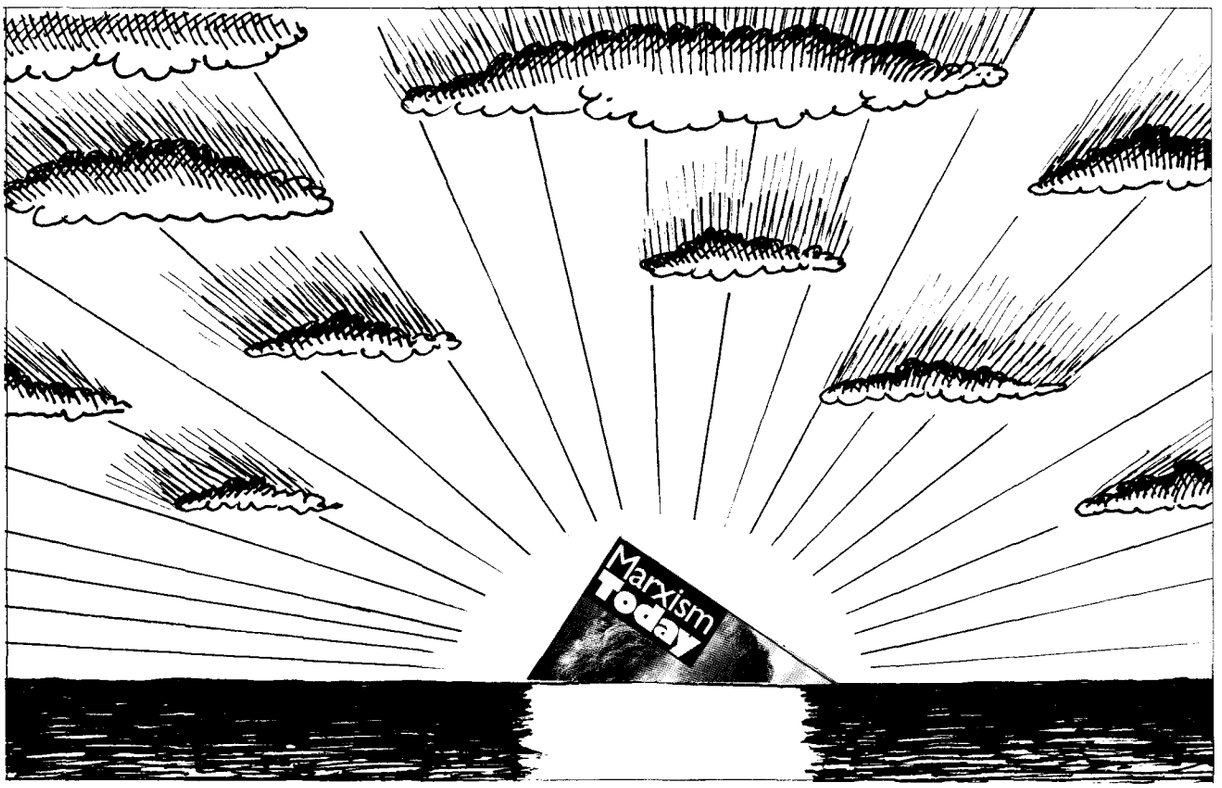
Martin Jacques presents the last issue ever

Goodbye, And Thanks



Cartoon: Nick Newman

For a shade over 14 years, *Marxism Today* has been an extraordinary spirit. The magazine came from an unlikely background, the Communist Party, and had an equally unlikely title. Yet who can deny that it has had a profound impact on the political scene, way beyond the number of copies it sold? The magazine used the term Thatcherism before anyone else. More importantly, it was the first to grasp what the term actually meant.

It sensed the profound crisis of the Left before virtually anyone on the Left had any real clue it existed. And in New Times, perhaps our most creative moment, it peered into the future with great insight. *Marxism Today,* more than anyone else, understood what our era was about. That has been the source of its power, the nature of its intelligence.

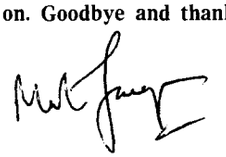
Marxism Today was a free spirit. We may have come from the CP, but we were never of it. We may have been on the Left, but we were never imprisoned by it. We were dissidents, living on the edge, occupying an intellectual diaspora. It gave the magazine enormous energy, intellectual freedom and a capacity for lateral thinking. For us, politics was an adventure, with no certainties and no guarantees. Good ideas and interesting people have no necessary political belonging. You can find them on the Right, on the Centre and on the Left. That is why the magazine was always a square peg in a round hole. It didn't do what conventional wisdom expected it to do.

That's obviously true in the context of its title. But I mean something much more than that. You know the arguments. What's this magazine of the Left doing, propounding how novel and innovative Thatcherism is? Why does it keep telling us about the shortcomings of the Left? Why does it interview Tory leaders? The answer is obvious. Our concept of politics has never been that of a football match between two teams where we were cast in the role of supporters' club. The reason why so many leading figures in the Labour Party (even those that at times have relished us) found us awkward is precisely that. Too bad. We were on a different wavelength.

Marxism Today was, at the end of the day, a band of writers who were broadly on the Left but who, in their wisdom, were more concerned about what they didn't know than what they did know. That's why *Marxism Today* was so open, so unpredictable, so exciting, so dangerous. It's also why *Marxism Today* was ahead of its time. It prefigured the fracturing of politics and the world that has proceeded apace over the last few years. Compared with a decade ago, the football mentality may be alive and well, but it is nothing like as strong as it was. I would like to think that *MT*'s lasting contribution to our enfeebled political culture might be twofold: that it has helped to make ideas central to the way we think about politics, and it has put a nail in the coffin of blinkered partisanship, otherwise known as pig ignorance.

And so to the end. The last issue of *Marxism Today*. I don't want to explain here why we are closing, I have done that elsewhere in the issue. I would like to thank everyone for all their support over the years: the writers (never paid a penny), the readers (never got anything for nothing), and the staff (paid a miserly penny). You were marvellous. You made it all possible. Thanks a million.

Marxism Today lived gloriously. And now it dies gloriously. We close with one of our greatest issues ever. We asked some of your favourite authors to write their best for the last. And they have not let you down. This is an issue to savour and treasure. We die as we lived – with enormous energy and intelligence, a little wit, lots of uncertainty . . . destination unknown. Now it's time to move on. Goodbye and thanks again. ●



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What *Marxism Today*

I shall miss *Marxism Today* more than I'll miss the philosophy in whose name it was founded. You covered political issues with an agreeable mixture of seriousness and geniality. Several of the most interesting and perceptive political articles and interviews that I have read in the last two or three years have appeared within your covers.

Politics is above all about ideas and putting them in to practice. Too much political coverage concentrates on gossip – 'Who's up and who's down?' And too much slants the debate according to a set of obvious preconceptions. *Marxism Today* treated politics as an adventure for serious grown-ups. I shall miss you.

What an epitaph from the chairman of the Conservative Party! Or do I mean *for* the chairman of the Conservative Party?

Chris Patten MP is chairman of the Conservative Party.

Nobody in politics has been able to ignore *Marxism Today*. Sometimes it was irritating, but always challenging, innovative, and full of ideas. Exactly what we need.

Paddy Ashdown is leader of the Liberal Democrats.

Marxism Today recognised that the composition of the working class had changed. Issues relating to women and ethnic minorities, sexual orientation and age were dragged on to the agenda. In doing that it was a major contributor to changing British politics. It paralleled and was supportive of the work of the GLC.

Ken Livingstone is Labour MP for Brent East.

Marxism Today anticipated the post-socialist world and made a telling contribution to the debate about alternatives to Thatcherism at a time when the Labour Party was intellectually moribund. I'm sorry to see it go, but keenly anticipate the day when its successor journal appears.

Hugo Young is a columnist on *The Guardian*.

It's always a matter of regret to see one expression of opinion shutting – it narrows the range of views available, and also the range of places I can send letters to – terrible! But I haven't agreed with much of what you've said in the 80s.

Keith Flett is one of the most prolific letter-writers in Britain today.

Marxism Today has been open-minded and curious, and respectful of ideas, wherever they have been encountered. It had a good eye for salient and entertaining thought; and it has always laboured to be clear and accessible. It leaves a significant vacuum.

John Birt is director-general designate of the BBC

I felt that, over the last few years, what I've enjoyed most about it has been its eclecticism and I think it's been a very valuable forum for all kinds of libertarian dissent. I'm sad to see it go.

Ian McEwen is a writer.

Marxism Today was a pioneer, ready to take risks that others avoided. It never forgot the value of matching imagination and ideas with rigorous analysis, and that will be its lasting contribution.

Gordon Brown MP is the Labour trade and industry spokesperson.

The main value of *Marxism Today* was to explain to the British Left what happened to it during the 1980s, and to give a notoriously introspective movement a sense of perspective. Such magazines in other times will always be as important, be they of the Right or Left.

Bob Geldof is a singer, writer and campaigner for famine relief.

I think it has been one of the few forums of intellectual debate at a time at which there is a great silence in many other places.

Ralf Dahrendorf is the warden of St Anthony's College, Oxford.

The end of *Marxism Today* is a moment of sadness. Throughout the 80s its debates on politics and culture spoke directly to me as a product of 60s libertarianism and 70s leftism. Optimistically, I would hope that those debates are now part of the mainstream. Pessimistically, I'm concerned that, as leninism is quite rightly consigned to the ash-can of history, the project to link an understanding of economic activity to a politics of social transformation may be abandoned at the moment it is most urgently needed.

Colin MacCabe is head of research at the BFI.

From the beginning until the last number I was sometimes a contributor, and all the time a very faithful reader. I don't think for a moment that the end of the magazine somehow cancels its achievement. No journal lasts forever, all journals are mortal – what is important is that they remain full of vitality.

John Berger is a writer.

Marxism Today had many detractors in the trade union movement. Its revisionist line was not always welcomed. It was at its best in the early 80s in analysing the implications of Thatcherism. Towards the end of its time it became less compulsory reading.

I thought that Eric Hobsbawm, Stuart Hall and Bea Campbell always had something interesting to say, but it was the lack of attention paid to the major changes taking place in the Labour Party that disappointed me. But for all its shortcomings, its passing will be mourned by all who enjoy a good political read.

Tom Sawyer is assistant general secretary of NUPE.

I suppose you've meant an alternative – the press in this country is so overwhelmingly right-wing that it was good to have dissident voices.

Margaret Drabble is a writer.

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Has Meant To Me

Marxism Today had its heyday in that period when cultural revolution was sweeping through the Labour Party and destroying its electoral credibility. It reached the same conclusions about the Labour Party as people like myself, who had been on the party's social democratic wing. And *Marxism Today* took Thatcher seriously before she came to power when a great many people, including myself, failed to see the force of her conviction politics.

I shall not mourn its passing, though. Now that communism is dead and buried it is a good moment for *Marxism Today* to fold. You have no future now except to dance on the graves of Lenin and Eric Hobsbawm.

Peter Jenkins is associate editor of *The Independent*.

Marxism Today has made a vital and lively contribution to all the major left debates since Mrs Thatcher came to power. Its most important message has been that the Left always needs to keep an open mind and be prepared to grapple with changed circumstances. I have not always agreed with *Marxism Today*'s conclusions, but it has always been there, confronting the difficult questions that won't go away.

Bryan Gould MP is the Labour environment spokesperson.

Since Martin Jacques took over the editorship from James Klugman, there has been a steady deterioration in the contents of *Marxism Today*. It has gradually turned into an eclectic, yuppified magazine of little interest to most marxists.

Tony Chater is editor of the *Morning Star*.

The demise of *Marxism Today* is, I suppose, inevitable following the demise of marxism itself. But its passing diminishes the range of intelligent coverage and comment in Britain. It maintained a very high standard of interest and writing.

David Steel MP is the Liberal Democrat foreign affairs spokesperson.

Not as much as the *Daily Telegraph*, speaking entirely personally. But it's always sad to see a contribution to debate disappear. It's been a very good magazine in recent years, very good indeed. All it needed was to change its policies and it would be a roaring success.

Edwina Currie is Conservative MP for Derbyshire South.

I watched the evolution of *Marxism Today* over the years with great interest and occasionally contributed to it – the evolution, I hope, as well as the magazine. The title never bothered me; nor did not being paid. It is better to pay nothing than to offer a token fee. I took the title simply to mean that all subjects have an economic base: the rest is open to discussion. The best feature of the magazine in the last two or three years has been its liberal internationalism. No other magazine has been quite like it.

Malcolm Rutherford is assistant editor of the *Financial Times*.

Its achievement was its style and confidence, but there was a dishonest ingredient which has left a bad aftertaste. Dishonest, because implicitly it projected debates within the Communist Party, as it saw them (new thinking versus dogmatic class economism), onto the wider Left. In doing so, it wiped out new left thinking from EP Thompson to Sheila Rowbotham and beyond, and it dichotomised social movements from working-class politics in a very ahistorical and innaccurate manner. Grrr!

Hilary Wainwright is a writer and member of the editorial board of *Socialist*.

I think you've kept an enormously important record, particularly of this period of political change since perestroika and glasnost and through the great change of 1989. A lot of the variety of political argument and the clarification of recent issues has been in your corner.

Malcolm Bradbury is the author of *The History Man*.

I was always surprised to find people like Heseltine in *Marxism Today*. But when I read the interviews they were always well worth while. It is going to leave a serious hole in the market, though I am glad it didn't change its name to *Marketing Today*.

Jon Snow is presenter of Channel Four News.

Marxism Today always had its own voice which carried remarkable weight. I enjoyed the way in which it refused to be a ghetto publication by allowing all sorts of people to speak through its pages. And I am glad that it is closing in a way that lets it go out with a bang and not a whimper.

Andreas Whittam-Smith is editor of *The Independent*.

I have always read *Marxism Today* and found it stimulating. It was another point of view to argue with, though there is a point at which a high Tory opinion and a *Marxism Today* opinion intersect. I sometimes feel that I have more in common with *Marxism Today* than with *The Guardian* or *The Independent*, or even the current Tory Party. The Chris Patten interview, for example, got my blood boiling – not with *Marxism Today* but with Chris Patten.

Peregrine Worsthorne is the former editor of the *Sunday Telegraph*.

Can I quote Victor Hugo in *Les Miserables*, who's got a line about the June days when he's talking about what you should do with the people who rioted in 1848 – he said you've got to shoot them down while respecting them: '*Il faut les abbattre, tout en les respectant*'.

Norman Stone is professor of modern history at Oxford University.

Marxism Today was the last repository of thought. I feel guilty now, because I always relied on it being there even when I didn't buy it. It was at its best when the Left had its back to the wall. *Marxism Today* was so good at fighting itself out of a corner, which it always succeeded in doing.

Fay Weldon is a writer and broadcaster.

I am not at all surprised to hear of *Marxism Today*'s demise, since its single most outstanding characteristic during its whole period of existence has been the absence of the slightest trace of marxism. Therefore, since it has been wrongly named from start to finish, it is appropriate that it should go into desuetude.

Paul Foot writes for the *Daily Mirror*.

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Sarah Benton asks how we can guard the guardians

Beyond Control

In one of the standard news items after the St Albans bomb, a reporter said, casually, that the audience for the Royal and Blues band had been 'security vetted'. No doubt they submitted with a good grace. Their lives were at stake; they were on the same side as the state security men in the undeclared war.

We all voluntarily submit – what choice do we have? – to an increasing number of security probes into our private lives. At any moment (visiting the British Museum, flying abroad, attending a parliamentary debate), our bags, coats, pockets, bodies may be searched outside and in. Our birthdays, addresses and intentions may be checked against a Special Branch computer. This is not an outdated hangover from the Troubles in Ireland. It is the way governments will keep track of individuals and communities no longer bound by the nation state. It is the future.

I don't mean to offer any sort of apology for the tactic of indiscriminate (or even discriminate) bombing. My concern is with the quality of political life in a world which is shifting uneasily on a mass of semi-covert security operations.

All this is going to increase in size and impact; it is already shaping our political life. This is because the new world order can no longer rely on nation states, or communist states, to contain people and ideas inside their boundaries. It is the problem of order which preoccupies our leaders; we have not yet invented the political institutions which give voice to the new individualism, the new communities which have destroyed the old order. The growing body of stateless people, trapped in Hong Kong concentration camps, on Kurdish mountains, in Croatian cities, can do nothing but appeal to the new international agencies for salvation. Here, humanity and democracy take second place to the need to ensure order. Devising new forms of international security is, in an order dominated by right-wing governments, a damn sight easier than creating new democratic institutions.

In the new, unlimited world, people can wander the globe, responding to the lure of the free market. The new world order cannot prevent such movements in the name of liberal democracy, so new forms of control are being invented. Such new rules, like Britain's asylum laws, will be neutral about racial and national 'origin', for that is part of the new world order. For several years, the Schengen group of national police forces has been meeting to draw up rules for policing people who travel in and through western Europe. You cannot be refused the right to travel because

Illustration: Simon Stern

Sarah Benton

of your national origin; you can if your motives and money don't check out.

In this new world, we will all travel accompanied by computerised official information about ourselves. We will all be electronically tagged. It won't be your national origin as such, but your likelihood of being a carrier of a disorder, like Aids, or contact with the Mafia or the PLO which will make your passport invalid. Where they don't officially exist, national identity schemes will be cobbled together, from national insurance numbers, or postal codes, or whatever can be fed into the latest breed of computer. The new world order is going to depend on a more vast and complex system of security than we have yet imagined.

Is the price of our new freedom truly to be a new system of international security over which we have no control? Is the hostage crisis not the end of the old world but the beginning of the new, in which murky security operations replaces the power of nation states? Or is this merely the chaos of the interregnum, when no true form of order has yet asserted itself?

The answer partly lies in the ability of communities to create new political institutions, which fit how we want to live. Here, those in the West seem to have a huge advantage over other societies. Unlike former communist societies, Western ones have vigorous civil associations of all sorts. They are used to being able to initiate action and organise their business as they like.

Accustomed as we are to thinking in terms of organising national political parties, discovering as we have that these receive less and less public interest, how are we to begin to create the new political forms which ensure we will not just be the pawns of powerful and secretive organisations, whether those are Oliver North, the Man from Moscow, or whoever wants to keep Salman Rushdie under threat of death? For until we do have a new sort of political leadership in this chaotic time, the old racisms and nationalisms are there to be exploited in terrifying ways. Without a national flag to bind themselves in, racisms rocket violently around in search of a home.

This is particularly dangerous where middle-class leaders are seen as abandoning their own communities in the rush to join more exciting cosmopolitan ones. It is this, said Bhikhu Parekh, which made Salman Rushdie vulnerable to popular Muslim hostility, and it is this which Norman Tebbit sniffs in his opportune discovery of British hostility to the EC. However, this popular hostility does nothing to check the growth of international security. If anything, it strengthens it, both by appearing to give support to right-wing governments which want to control aliens, and by refusing to create the new political institutions which could keep international security in check.

We need forms which can both keep a check on the new security apparatus, and which give people a place in which to exercise citizens' rights, with real political power. Which can find new powers to enforce the environmental controls we want, which can devise appropriate economic policies and public services which different communities want. This means we need to overhaul every single one of our institutions, from parish to international gatherings, to make them fit for our needs. For instance, in the UN as presently constituted, how do stateless people have a voice – short of trying to catch the restless attention of the global (US) media, or shooting a plane out of the sky, or dying, graphically? How does a housing estate enforce the street cleaning schedule, the employment schemes it needs? How do we make the European parliament into a representative forum?

So far, the Greens have gone furthest in creating international forums for exchanging policies, and trying to marry community democracy to international 'good government' policies. Perhaps the old socialist Left, freed from the shackles of nationalism and its treacherous party loyalties, can join them?●

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Suzanne Moore

Josh Pulman

Breaking up is not so hard to do...

Sting In The Tale

I've tried with *Marxism Today*. I really have. And I can't say it's been easy. When I first saw it, I must say I was a bit intimidated. I didn't think it was really my kind of magazine, but the attraction was undeniable. All those long articles on the economy by men with big graphs. This was what I ought to be reading, I decided. I mean, if I just wanted a good time there were plenty of other magazines around. But with *MT* it was different. It was serious. Maybe it was time I got serious too. Against my better judgement, as well as the advice of my girlfriends, I got involved.

Looking back, there were a number of other reasons too. I was vaguely 'of the Left', and *Marxism Today* was about as vague about it as I was. Yet it managed to have a momentum, an energy all of its own. Although I was reluctant to admit it, I soon knew it wasn't what I really wanted. But who knows, I thought, perhaps it's what I need. It would do me good. I could always just ignore the things I didn't like and hope they would go away. Like every other woman who embarks on a relationship in the hope that one day she will be able to change her partner, that her point of view, so long ignored, will finally be taken seriously, I had set myself on the road that can only lead to disappointment and frustration.

Maybe that's why, in the midst of all the self-congratulation – the trumpeting of the undoubted virtues of *Marxism Today* – I find it hard to get too sentimental. Maybe it's because you can't miss what you never really had. Whatever *Marxism Today* had, it wasn't mine. Whatever it represented, it never seemed to represent my interests personally or politically. If this sounds selfish, then maybe it is, or maybe it's just a recognition of a relationship that was never going to work out. Anyway, why shouldn't a great magazine, like a great pop song, feel like it was written for you personally? Yet both as a reader and a writer for *MT*, I often wondered what I was doing. Hell, I'm no Eric Hobsbawm. I don't even like the word 'hegemony'. But the bottom line is that I don't write about what *MT* considers to be the main course/cause.

Feminism and cultural politics were always regarded as the pudding. Nice if you can get it, but something you don't actually *need* to live on. You served them up in small portions to titillate the tastebuds, you didn't want people gorging themselves on them. God knows, they might prefer them. And then what would happen? If you don't eat your meat, then you won't grow up into a big boy, will you?

Instead, *Marxism Today* offered other temptations. It said it was now all right to like advertising, designer clothes and Tory MPs, which the Left traditionally had no time for. Some critics claimed that, in trying to get to know the enemy, it had become the enemy. Much of the Left hated the magazine far more than the Right ever did. They loathed the lifestyle (mostly imaginary) even more than the politics. (What politics? as they always used to say.) That was never a problem for me. But when I started working as the magazine's cultural editor, in 1988, I started to realise that the magazine's priorities were not mine.

Yet I carried on bothering in some sort of way, because I still believed in the sweet nothings that were whispered occasionally at meetings. I thought that there would be more women writers. I naively thought things would change. Month after month of more men with graphs wore me down. If readers were expected to cope with a complicated political vocabulary, how come they were not expected to cope with a cultural one? How come *The Face* could talk about the postmodernism of cyberpunk so long before *MT* could? How come something that I thought was different had ended up simply replicating the artificial distinction between politics and culture that it is the duty of any truly radical publication to break down?

One day it hit me: *Marxism Today*, which had promised to be different, was just like all the others. Whatever my fantasies about it, *MT* was fundamentally a political magazine, which meant that it would continue to fundamentally exclude a whole lot of people. It hadn't just infiltrated the mainstream; it had become inseparable from the mainstream. Fleet Street loved it, and just as other newspapers and journals, including those of the Left, divide themselves into political coverage and arts sections, and never the twain shall meet, so had *MT*. It's not that there is an automatic alliance between sexual and cultural politics, except that these are the things which continue to be excluded from the mainstream notion of political coverage.

While *Marxism Today* gave some space to those things (and even to me) I never felt it was enough. It was always a nod in the right direction, rather than a proper acceptance of their importance. The charge that of course is levelled at anything so ephemeral as modern sexual politics, or the watching of *Neighbours*, or the plot of some obscure work of fiction, is that they are somehow not of the real world. But genuine cultural politics does not mean that politics evaporates into air, leaving only some dried-up work of art to analyse, nor can it mean any longer that we have to apply some PC checklist before we start enjoying ourselves. It is much more difficult than that – but what's wrong with being difficult?

Marxism Today provided the space for some people (mostly men, I have to say) to be very difficult, and I value that still. I hope that, in another incarnation, it will continue to do so. But I no longer accept the excuses about why that could not be extended to other areas. So for me, breaking up isn't as hard to do as it might be. Though it's probably not the done thing to confess my infidelities in the midst of this wake, I just couldn't leave you any other way.●

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And Not A Shot Fired

So you think Thatcherism is over. That somehow it belongs to yesteryear. **Stuart Hall**, the man who coined the phrase, thinks differently. He argues that the revolution is still rolling

The temptation to pay our last respects to Mrs Thatcher on the occasion of the final issue of *MT* is too strong to resist. How would she feel if the journal which gave her so much respectful attention during her long political reign – even going so far as to name a whole political philosophy after her – were to neglect to do the honourable thing in its closing pages? Some readers may think that, as Julian Critchley recently remarked, her remains having been shown to the Tory Party conference, she should now be permitted a decent interment. After all, everyone (even *Marxism Today*) seems convinced that Major's smiling face presages a return to business as usual. There is even a hint of a new phenomenon unfolding before us – 'Majorism', with its rising public expenditure, more interventionist role for the DTI (and, it is to be hoped, the Rottweiler kennels for Michael Howard), a citizens' charter for consumers, civilised briefings on gay rights from Sir Ian McKellen, and a crafty, crab-like approach (avoiding Tebbit traps and Ridley-like potholes en route) towards the Maastricht summit. Where is the savage excess, the brutalism, of the Thatcher years now? Can there be anything more worth saying about them?

The centre of political gravity has certainly shifted. The whole political atmosphere is different. But 'Thatcherism' was never designed to refer primarily to this level of the political game. What of its deeper objectives, underlying strategies and long-term directions? My argument is that, while every effort is being undertaken to make the memory of the Thatcher government disappear, Thatcherism is still working its way through the system. Success does not mean that everybody was converted to Thatcherism, or that it triumphed completely or even that Thatcher will have a political after-life. Addicted to the euphonious cadences of her lovely voice as I became, even I never believed in her political immortality. But that was never what we argued, hard as our critics struggled so to construct it. Thatcherism's 'success' means that we are still living in the aftermath of its social revolution: in particular, of that new *social regime* which Thatcherism installed, in civil society and public and institutional life.

Whereas most postwar governments attempted mainly to 'manage things', Thatcherism had a project – a set of long-term, strategic objectives, a model which it used as a template of reconstruction and a strategy for putting this into effect. In short, it was engaged in a 'hegemonic form of politics'. This idea was Gramscian in inspiration, to define the distinctiveness of Thatcherism's politics: not a zero-sum, all-or-nothing, game, but more Gramsci's 'incessant efforts' to shift decisively the balance of forces. We called it a 'project' – the project of 'regressive modernisation' – as a way of insisting on its strategic and historic character. The analysis also took on some of the overtones of the so-called 'regulationist school' (writers like Aglietta, Liepietz and others) who were influenced by Gramsci's 'Americanism And Fordism' essay. They argued that the key periodisations within capitalism were the shifts from one 'regime of regulation' to another; and these always entailed *both* a new 'regime of accumulation' and a new 'mode of social and political regulation'. Liepietz defined the latter as 'a body of interiorised rules and social processes... norms, habits, laws, regulating networks... that ensure the unity of the process'. (It was around these themes that the critique of Thatcherism and the 'New Times' analysis converged in these pages.)

Alas! 'Hegemony' is one of those foreign words which stick in the gullet of pragmatic Englishmen, refusing to be absorbed into the lower stomach. The Left translated it as outright victory in a 'war of manoeuvre', not – as it really was – the objective of a 'war of position'; and, finding no simple triumphs, breathed deeply again. The idea that Thatcherism had a 'project' proved equally unacceptable to that tribe of political pundits who grub around in the shallow earth of parliamentary life, vainly hoping to glimpse something of historic importance flitting by in the corridors of power. They consoled themselves with the thought that Thatcherism was solely preoccupied with the pragmatics of 'staying in power' – an observation of stunning banality which passed for sophisticated wisdom in the serious press. We might as well have tried spitting in the wind.

What was Thatcherism's 'project'? One way of understanding this is in terms of that catchphrase of the Thatcher era – 'market forces'. 'Market forces' represents more than a rational preference for markets over centralised planning as the more effective form of modern economic organisation. It makes 'the market' into an organising principle of social life – a law as general, for born-again Thatcherites, as 'the class struggle' ever was to marxists.

It is the *only* valid language of moral and social calculation, because it obeys an objective logic, driven by the 'hidden hand' of impersonal forces, and is not interest-laden, context-bound or morally constrained. The 'social good' can only be calculated by reducing it to individual needs, aggregated on the basis of a formal (and empty) 'equality'. It means imposing the collective will of a mythical majority on the unruly but sovereign interests of individuals and is therefore, by definition, the beginning of tyranny. Thus Thatcher: 'There is no such thing as 'society', there is only individuals and their families'.

The Left never took this seriously as a 'philosophy' – that is, ideas which organise and regulate practice. It preferred to explain Thatcherism in moralistic terms – as the usual wickedness of 'the old gang'. Thus it constantly underestimated the depth of the 'culture of

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Illustration: Paul Bateman

individualism', the cogency of classic liberal political economy and the historical embeddedness – alongside other philosophies, to be sure – with which its discourses and practices are rooted in the everyday life of the first 'market society' on earth. To put it briefly, it lacked a conception of the kind of social revolution which brings a new regime into place.

The Thatcherites, however, not only espoused it as a social gospel, but, like latter-day saints, did not shrink from its necessary corollaries: the use of state power to drive the model through; the 'deregulation' of all institutional arrangements; the massive accumulation of economic, social and cultural power in the hands of the classes who own, manage and run things – an inevitable consequence of *all* market systems; the 'privatisation' of social problems; the restoration of the divine 'right to manage'; and that unintended but inevitable consequence of the gap between the religious zeal of the Mission and the pragmatics of its implementation, the Ministerial Lie.

The private sector, which was already disciplined in a general way by 'market forces', but may have applied them in the past in less rigorous ways, has been disciplined with remarkable single-mindedness. But the main thrust of reform is most vivid and penetrating in the public sector. There is not a school, hospital, social service department, polytechnic or college in the country which has not been so remodelled. The practices of daily life, the professional ethics, the language which is spoken in meetings, the way documents are prepared, work routines designed and priorities defined and fixed, have been totally reframed. The restructuring drive is remorseless; compounded by the fact that the social conservatism, institutional inertia, bureaucratic deformation of our public institutions, plus the absence of any alternative strategy for their reform, made them sitting ducks.

Take the case of the NHS. The details have been too well rehearsed to repeat here. In any case, important as they are, it is possible to get bogged down in a pragmatic discussion (which the media are only too happy to conduct) about whether this aspect is preferable to that (of the order of, 'would you prefer to be just hanged, or drawn and quartered as well?'), while losing sight of the *process*. It is clear that from the outset Thatcher was determined to reshape the NHS; not because she is a wicked ogre who wants sick people to suffer, but because its principles of organisation – universality of provision on an equal basis, funded through public taxation, and the decommodification of health and illness – ran counter to every shibboleth of her new model 'philosophy'. Of course, if you ask ministers, who have to calibrate the pragmatics of support and the timing of legislation, they will deny this. But the Thatcherite 'think tanks', whose

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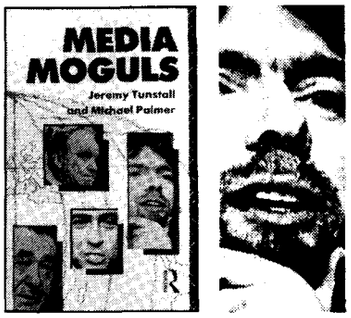

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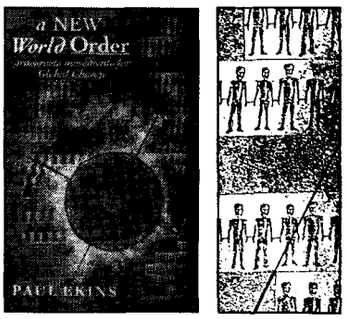

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ROUTLEDGE

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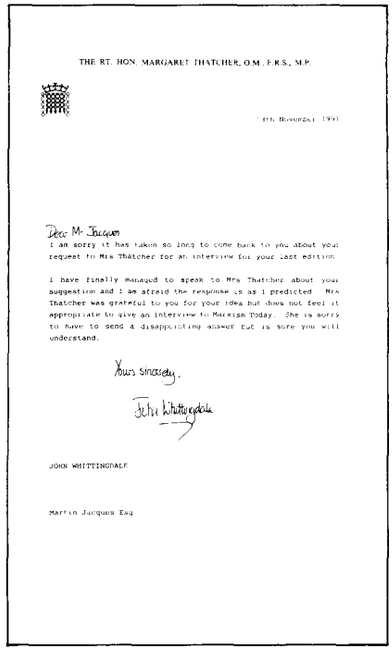
task it was to pioneer ideas in their pure form and let ministers worry about the timing, wouldn't. They know that it was unthinkable for a government, committed to reconstructing social life on the principle of 'market forces', to leave the NHS, and all it stood for, intact.

Such a dismantling was set in train by the PM herself before the 1983 election, and only abandoned when it became clear that, as *MT* said at the time, in the NHS Thatcherism finally met the limit of how far the British people were willing to go along with the destruction of the postwar settlement. Tactically, she backed off: 'The NHS is safe in our hands'. But she did not back off strategically. After the 1987 election – 'dizzy with success', to quote Stalin – she returned to the attack. Robin Cook is absolutely correct to describe the reform process which Kenneth Clarke then set in motion as 'privatisation', if by that word we understand, not the selling-off of hospitals and GP practices, but the gradual and relentless disciplining of the NHS according to the market *model*. The media's attempt to stage-manage a rebuttal on the tendentious ground that, after all, the NHS is not being auctioned off like British Gas, was an exercise in collusive bad faith.

The conception of 'choice' which underpins the NHS reforms has two major and decisive weaknesses. It assumes, as classic liberalism always has, that the means of exercising choice – money – is evenly distributed. But the very market model on which it is based ensures that this cannot and never will be so. The granting of an equal right which can only be exercised unequally is a form of 'negative freedom'; and this critique applies as much to Hayek and Thatcher as it did to Locke and Adam Smith. The second is that modernity is more individuated but it is also more complex and thus more interdependent. Health, like transport, education, public amenities and a host of other things, cannot be reduced in the modern world to an individual calculus.

This point is well illustrated by what is happening in education. Market choice needs information and, in the attempt to get schools to 'mimic' the market, the equivalent of 'price' (the point of equilibrium between demand and supply) is the league tables of schools. These are not worth the paper they are printed on, in terms of the historic failure to educate all children to a standard which modern life requires, since the tables cannot measure the main factor which underpins this failure – the massive discrepancies between the different backgrounds from which schools draw their pupils and the relative measures of success of different pedagogies with variable intakes. No matter. League tables are what we will be given, since they are how parents are going to 'choose', and how parental 'demand' is going to be funnelled from one school to another (and how, accordingly, weak schools will become weaker, and academically good schools more academic, and the structure of educational opportunities more deeply unequal).


THE RT. HON. MARGARET THATCHER, O.M., F.R.S., M.P.

11th November 1991

Dear Mr Jacques
I am sorry it has taken so long to come back to you about your request to Mrs Thatcher for an interview for your last edition.

I have finally managed to speak to Mrs Thatcher about your suggestion and I am afraid the response is as I predicted. Mrs Thatcher was grateful to you for your idea but does not feel it appropriate to give an interview to Marxism Today. She is sorry to have to send a disappointing answer but is sure you will understand.

Yours sincerely,

John Whittingdale

JOHN WHITTINGDALE

Martin Jacques Esq

Well, dear readers, we did try.

Higher education, meanwhile, is being submitted to market disciplines in a more direct manner. The long-delayed expansion is being driven through by tying the funding of polytechnics and colleges to their capacity to compete in 'the educational marketplace'. This means that numbers must rise, unit costs must fall and no new expenditure must be undertaken. The consequences, as everyone who teaches knows, are that staff numbers have fallen drastically (some polytechnics have lost a third of their academic staff over the last decade), staff-student ratios and teaching contact hours have risen dramatically, and inevitably the quality of teaching is suffering – at the very time when less well-prepared students from educationally-disadvantaged groups are coming into higher education for the first time. The one thing which will not lead to staff increases or get teachers more money, time to think or research, or promotion, is – *teaching*. That is because, though the market is not yet fully installed, it has already ensured that polytechnics and colleges are conceived, managed, funded and measured as business machines. Teaching is simply one of those unmeasurable 'goods' – a by-product of the management systems, accountants and computer systems experts, which are the only categories of staff to have actually increased.

What we are outlining here, then, is a philosophy, a model, a strategy – the elements of a new social regime. If expressed in cookbook terms, the recipe would go something like this (*Mrs Thatcher's Cookbook*, price £200 from *Marxism Today*'s Cookery Department. Credit card orders now.) First, take

'While every effort is being undertaken to make the memory of the Thatcher government disappear, Thatcherism is still working its way through the system'

The *Marxism Today* Story

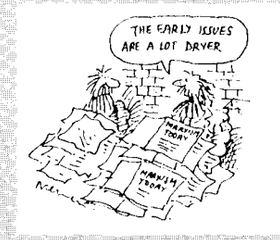
The history of the magazine from 1977–1991

Nov 1977: Martin Jacques becomes editor.

Sep 1978: Eric Hobsbawm's article 'The Forward March Of Labour Halted?' argues, in contrast to the prevailing wisdom, that the labour movement is in long-term political decline.

The forward march of labour and the labour movement, which Marx predicted, appears to have come to a halt in this country about 25 to 30 years ago. Both the working class and the labour movement since then have been passing through a period of crisis, or, if you prefer to be mealy-mouthed about it, of adaptation to a new situation.
(**Eric Hobsbawm**, *The Forward March Of Labour Halted?*)

Nov 1978: Tony Lane's article on Liverpool predicts the riots.



Cartoons: Nick Newman

Young people, already disaffected, will turn increasingly to theft and destruction of public property... A discreet cordon of police will surround the middle-class areas and the city centre. Working-class areas in the inner city and the perimeter estates will become 'no-go' areas subjected to sporadic raids by heavily protected task forces. Riots will occasionally break out, shops looted and buildings fired.
(**Tony Lane**, *Liverpool – City Of Harder Times To Come*)

Jan 1979: Stuart Hall's 'The Great Moving Right Show' inaugurates *MT*'s pioneering analysis of 'Thatcherism' and sees the first recorded use of the term.

Nobody seriously concerned with political strategies in the current situation can now afford to ignore the 'swing to the Right'. We may not yet understand its extent and its limits, its specific character, its causes and effects. But the tendency is hard to deny. It no longer looks like a temporary swing in political fortunes, a short-term shift in the balance of forces... We need to discuss its parameters more fully and openly on the Left without inhibition or built-in guarantees.
(**Stuart Hall**, *The Great Moving Right Show*) ▶

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◀ **May 1979:** Margaret Thatcher becomes prime minister.
Oct 1979: The magazine is redesigned, with a bigger format, graphics and a snappy logo. Margaret Thatcher is on the cover.
Oct 1980: Eric Hobsbawm interviews Tony Benn – the start of a relationship that finally soured in 1983 when Benn publicly criticised the magazine for its line on Labour. The interview was extracted in *The Guardian*, the first of many to be reprinted in *The Guardian* and *The Independent*, and also the *Financial Times*, *The Times*, *Sunday Times* and *Sunday Correspondent*.
Sep 1980: Polish workers, led by Lech Walesa, form Solidarity.
Jul 1981: Rioting erupts in Toxteth.
Oct 1981: *Marxism Today* is sold nationally in newsagents for the first time. Sales leap to over 9000. Exclusive interview with Lech Walesa. Also the publication of *Marxism Today*'s first book, *The Forward March Of Labour Halted*, in which Eric Hobsbawm takes issue with the Bennite Left.

I am not a good politician. I am first of all a consumer and I want something to consume. So I want to tell the truth. I want to have more than you have in your country. I want to be happier than you are. I want to adjust everything so as to reach these aims. But at the same time I don't want power. (Interview with **Lech Walesa**)

Apr 1982: Task force sets sail for the Falklands.
Sep 1982: Tony Lane writes an article criticising corruption among shop stewards. *Marxism Today* is attacked by Mick Costello, Communist Party industrial organiser, in the *Morning Star*. Bitter warfare in the CP culminates in a formal split in 1985. *Marxism Today* is under assault from many different points on the Left.
Oct 1982: *Marxism Today* holds its first weekend event: 'The Moving Left Show'. About 1700 people attend.

'I was surprised by the openness of mind of the participants... Their capacity to take realistic and comprehending account of Thatcherism and their sympathetic awareness of the expanding centre in British politics was in contrast with the myopia which afflicts much of the Labour Party.
The participants were predominantly youngish and inevitably middle class... They were people of superior intelligence or education and of moderate disposition... A good deal of the talk was about how to come to terms with the political cen- ▶

'It was unthinkable for a government committed to the principle of 'market forces' to leave the NHS, and all it stood for, intact'

your institution by the scruff of the neck and 'cap' it. Secondly, detach or float off as many operations as possible. If necessary, break the power and authority of any representative arrangement still attached to the carcass. Then, using market mechanisms, induce or squeeze people and services out of the public into the private system, which you should have ready at hand. Season and eat. That is the Model.

Then comes the Strategy. Send in the Thatcherite shock troops, in three waves. The first is the new echelon of managers who, whatever their private political inclinations (they are all, of course, honourable men, kind to their good lady wives and dumb animals) function as the New Model Army. Their task is to restore managerial prerogative, break the power of the professionals and their ethic, and restructure the institutions along market lines. They operate at the coal face of the system, and are responsible for the day-to-day implantation of the new habits, routines, disciplines, the language of calculation, the fine tactical decisions, which gradually *institutionalise* the new 'regime'. These hired technicians of the Thatcher Revolution now operate in every sector, and they speak that metallic discourse of 'managerialism' which is the main product of the business schools which have mushroomed in every educational institution.

The second wave consists of businesspeople, who must be recruited into the governing strata. Their task is to tutor and educate public institutions into the mysteries of market calculation. It needs to be added that, since the British business class is the most ill-educated, the least intellectually formed and the most deeply philistine governing class in the Western world, this move – fulfilling an old dream of that wily reprobate, Lloyd George – is the equivalent of recruiting a whole generation of Benthamite simplifiers into positions of strategic power and influence. There they now sit, in their pinstripe shirts and detachable white collars, in the few minutes they can spare from lunching and launching their own market-driven enterprises, guardians of the entrepreneurial re-education of schools, colleges, polytechnics, universities, hospitals, arts councils, public services and amenities. They are shortly to inspect schools – a task given them by that renowned expert in classroom pedagogy, Mr Clarke, no doubt as a reward for the breadth of their intellectual achievements. They may not know much but at least they know what they like...

The 'third wave' consists of the 'independent consultants', called in to advise on implementing 'efficiency' measures. Though invited to conduct objective reviews, they are not only deeply imbued with the managerialist ethic, but are usually well-apprised before they start of the 'improvements' which the institution which invited them in desires to make. Surprise, surprise – that is exactly what they discover these institutions 'need' – a beautifully logical and self-fulfilling exercise. They have the advantage of giving 'cuts' a spuriously impersonal air and thus lend the imposition of 'market forces' a veneer of legitimacy. These 'independent consultants' sometimes seem to have become an 'official' arm of the implantation of a market regime in every institution in the country.

Anyone who does not recognise the main outlines and consistency of the 'model' and the 'strategy' just outlined either does not work in a large public institution, or is not in touch with the strategies which now govern them or with how they are being reshaped. Most people spend their waking hours learning the new language of incentives, cost-effectiveness, quality audits, performance indicators and the rest of the managerial newspeak, in which the crude calculus of market forces is covered over by the thin figleaf of systems analysis mumbo-jumbo and quack psychology. Ways of thinking, formulating strategies and defining objectives which reflect the actual practices they are engaged in have become 'lost languages', and a whole new form of institutional non-speak has been born. One institution of higher education recently, discussing the lack of adequate planning for new courses, expressed this problem as a failure 'to think with any clarity about the nature and delivery of our product portfolio'. It is just over a decade since these were referred to as 'courses' and the customers for whom they are being designed 'students' and the activity 'education'. And not a shot has yet been fired...

It is this utterly transformed landscape over which Labour is preparing to 'take power', hoping to graft a few humane considerations onto a world which has been fundamentally remodelled. It is hoping to find the humane heart of a welfare society beating still beneath the Thatcherite veneer. And so it may be. But our public institutions are not simply underfunded. They lack a strategic place in the scheme of things. And they now operate according to a completely different logic. The plain fact is that the Left has nothing remotely like a 'social philosophy' which it can state in anything remotely resembling the pithy, memorable and succinct form of Thatcher's which we quoted earlier. And the fact that Major lacks one too is no consolation. He has been driven back by the horrendous social calamities which face every modern society which tries to sustain modernity by 'market forces' alone. But, though he has tried out a few alternatives (the classless society, the citizen's charter) they lack conviction because, unlike Thatcherism, they are not harnessed to any deep institutional logic or strategy. So Majorism is an un-hegemonic project, as much pulled along in the slipstream of the Thatcher revolution, which is still unrolling, as the Left.

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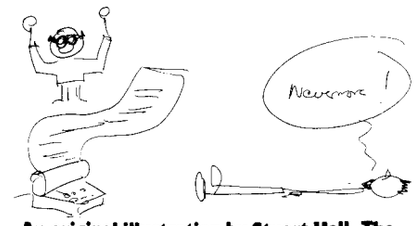
An alternative is not, of course, easy to dream up or snap into place. The Left, for example, cannot simply *reverse* Thatcher's 'There is no such thing as society', since it cannot any longer subscribe to the proposition that 'there is no such thing as the individual, there is only society'. For this would be to return to exactly the simplifying, essentialising collectivism which such very diverse forces as Thatcherism, 'actual-existing socialism' and the diversity and differentiation of modern life between them have dismantled.

One of the problems about the current NHS debate, for example, is that, faced with the imposition of the market model and its manifest inequalities, we are tempted to pretend that all was well with it before. But we know that this was not the case. It is not simply that the old styles of state ownership and management of the public sector are politically out of favour for the time being. They have failed to provide either the scale and range of services, the models of control and accountability, the flexibility and sensitivity to consumer needs in a diversifying society, or the innovations which would allow them to keep in touch with modern developments. Nor is it simply because they were bureaucratic and inefficient as well as unwieldy, defensive and undemocratic to their 'clients'. It is also that, with the collapse of the communist experiment, the deep flaws of the state-managed economy and society are profound and extensive and any Left alternative cannot now avoid confronting that historic failure.

The problem is that, having faced up to that unpalatable fact, many people fell back on an uncritical acceptance of 'markets'. But their anti-social side-effects do not simply wither away. We have not squared up to or pushed beyond this impasse. In fact, all markets operate on the basis of prior, non-market conditions of existence. They always need to be subject to real, wide-ranging and effective regulation. Above all, they need to be harnessed and framed by a much wider *social strategy* which can be materialised in terms of an actual institutional regime. Since at least the emergence of mass democracy and perhaps before then, *the* critical issue of modern politics is and remains the balance between public and private forms (and spheres) of regulation. Feminist debate has demonstrated both how complex this line is in modern societies and how deceptive is the notion of a clear-cut, mutually exclusive boundary between them. The lesson now needs to be applied to our thinking about 'the public sphere'. Without this, many of the excellent and innovative ideas about how to redesign particular sectors of public life (such as those in *MT*'s excellent issue on the subject) lack any unifying principle or overarching strategy.

We have not yet conducted any deep or searching discussion on where the line between the private and the public is to be redrawn: which areas are to be principally regulated by which principle and how the 'private' is to be overdetermined by some wider social logic. We do not know what forms of regulation are capable of submitting the laws of the market to this more general strategic social conception; or – more important, from the point of view of the argument advanced here – what an alternative public 'regime of regulation' would look like and the institutional models by which it is to be instituted. We know 'the social' exists. But we do not know, in post-state socialist modern societies, how to calculate it. This is now the most important agenda item for the Left. The only regret is that *Marxism Today* is departing the field with this historic task, which it did so much to define, uncompleted.●

'Majorism is an un-hegemonic project, as much pulled along in the slipstream of the Thatcher revolution, which is still unrolling, as the Left'



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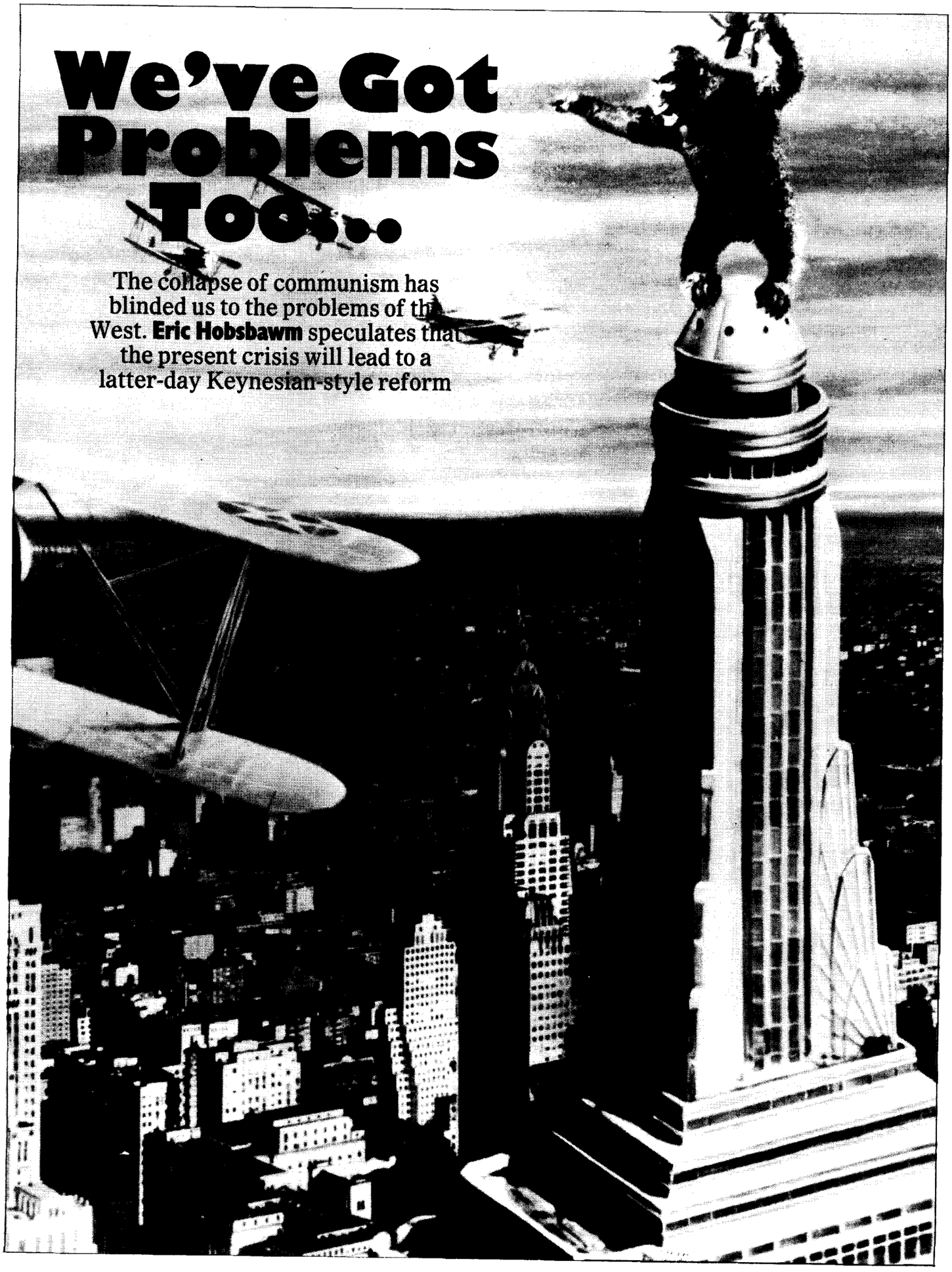
We've Got Problems Too...

The collapse of communism has blinded us to the problems of the West. **Eric Hobsbawm** speculates that the present crisis will lead to a latter-day Keynesian-style reform



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Every editorialist in the West has told us that communism has collapsed because it didn't work and capitalism has triumphed because it did. Nowhere should that triumph be more visible than in the greatest capitalist society, the one which has most consistently relied on the market and the profit incentive, and the one which is still, with 43% of the total GDP of the developed world (ie, of the Oecd countries) the dominant western economy.[1] But neither the mood nor the reality of the USA at the moment of Soviet collapse is triumphalist.

I write this in an apartment on Union Square, New York, part of a complex of high-rise towers and office space, looking a bit like a King Kong-size toy town, which was the last completed monument of the great property development boom of the 1980s. Its most characteristic inhabitants appear to be Japanese – anything outside Japan is a bargain for them – but the financial services firm which was to occupy the entire commercial base of the buildings went bust in 1990 and most of the office windows are dark. 'Hard times are palpable in Union Square', as the commercial property column of the *New York Times* correctly reports. Upwards of half a million square feet of commercial space are vacant around the square, without counting the parking lots and ruins of old property still waiting for the golden future as sites for condominiums. For the time being, the future has run out. Only the cops watch over it round the Union Square park, from which the drug dealers and the homeless were cleared away at the start of the 1980s boom to create the right atmosphere for estate agents' clients. Two police cars are permanently stationed there as a reminder, and the last homeless have just been chased away towards unknown destinations from the last sheltered corners on the square.

Along one side of it runs 14th Street, the Oxford Street of the Latino poor, where transactions are conducted in Spanish and men sit on ladders on the pavement facing into the open stores and bazaars to watch out for potential shoplifters of $5 shirts and discount cosmetics. Today their view is uninterrupted. You could now jog along the once-packed pavements. Money is scarce, which is not surprising, since 9-10% of the New York labour force is unemployed, and, what is more to the point, about 1m out of the city's 7m inhabitants are on public assistance. But even those who still have money – and there is plenty of it about in this town – are not immune. Airlines advertise bargains to the thrifty rich and firms offer part-exchange and second-hand deals on luxury watches. ('If you thought a Rolex was out of reach before, it could be yours today'.) Next time round they will have to find a new euphemism for 'slump', since 'recession' no longer sounds milder and better.

Equally striking to the foreigner is the sheer decline in the technology of everyday life, which used to be the pride of Americans and the amazement of visitors from the backward old world. It isn't only the public infrastructure, although the impression of a city on the verge of the Third World is sometimes hard to avoid, especially when (as today) a major 87 year-old watermain has just burst, shutting down 42nd Street for an undetermined period. (As in other rickety economies, the media now take pride not in how well things function, but how quickly they are patched up.) Recently the entire air traffic of New York was paralysed for the best part of a day by a breakdown in a substation of AT&T, that byword for telecommunications efficiency. To put it briefly, the mechanics of daily life no longer work smoothly and efficiently, the way we expect them to do in, say, Sweden or Austria, without causing surprise.

New York, you will say, is a special case, and this is no doubt true. Well, in Philadelphia, a mayor's commission on literacy and those friends of humankind, the Philip Morris Companies Inc, took out a full-page advertisement to point out that one out of four Philadelphians is actually or functionally illiterate.[2] Inner cities, minority-inhabited, are perhaps also special cases. But is California, the great open frontier of the American Dream, to which men and women have been migrating in numbers so vast that its population, now around 30m, is almost half as large again as the next-largest US state, and more than one out of every 10 Americans is today a Californian? Yet (the *New York Times* again) 'the recession... has hit California particularly hard, leaving its once-robust economy to bring up the rear of the national recovery', which, in spite of rosy predictions, shows no signs of happening yet. But observers 'also point to many other factors including high housing costs... traffic congestion, crime, deteriorating social services' for the novel fact that in the past year more people at the peak of their working lives (30-44 years) have left California for other states than moved in. People are beginning to move out of Los Angeles the way they have long moved out of New York.

The truth is that the USA as a whole has ceased to be a good advertisement for capitalism, even in straightforward economic terms. The strongest selling point for the American way of life was material improvement. That is still what immigrants expect to find, and do find, when they cross the rapidly widening income gap between the developed North and the Third World. But not the natives, except for the top fifth of the nation's income earners, or more exactly the top 5%, who have done spectacularly well in the era of Reaganism as under Thatcher. In the 1980s (1979-89) the shares of total income accruing to each of the bottom four-fifths declined. The top 1% of families improved their income by almost 75%, the bottom 20% dropped by 4.4%. In other words, inequality grew dramatically. In absolute terms, the after-tax income of the bottom 40% of Americans was lower at the end of the decade than in 1979. This is perhaps not surprising, since real hourly wages over this decade fell by 9.3%. In fact, four-fifths of married families with children would have had lower incomes than 10 years ago, if the women of the families had not taken jobs or worked longer.[3]

In fact, today almost one in 10 Americans can only buy all their food with the help of the government 'food stamps' which pay for some of it. In 1970 only two in 100 did so. Food stamps are available only to Americans who earn not more than $1117 a month for a family of four (roughly £140 a week by the exchange rate of early November 1991), who have a car worth not more than $4500 (roughly £2600) and assets of no more than $2000 (£1100). In short, who are undeniably poor.[4]

This stagnation, or even decline, in the condition of the American people is new. Though the phenomenon is more extreme in the USA, it is actually quite general. After a golden age which lasted from the late 1940s to the early to middle 1970s, capitalism is once more in trouble. Those of us who live comfortably in the rich countries of the North have failed to recognise this for three reasons. The welfare state systems of reformed postwar capitalism provide more shelter against slumps than in the 1930s. The main industrial countries have not felt the full force of the global economic hurricane which devastated other regions in the 1980s, like Latin America and Africa. Last, but not least, the collapse of communism has diverted attention from the troubles of our system.

But in the early 1990s it must be recognised that it *is* once again in trouble. For a generation, capitalism did what nobody before the war thought it was capable of: it created full employment. But since the 1970s, mass unemployment is back. In 1960, five west European industrial countries averaged under 1.7% unemployment, but at the peak of the late-80s boom, they stood at 8.5% (during the slump of the early 80s, they averaged 11%).[5] For a generation, most people in the developed countries assumed that their real income would go up every year of their working life, rain or shine, barring accidents or the deliberate choice of dropping out. Governments, employers and unions learned to operate on this assumption in the long golden years, though they disagreed about how big the rise should be, how it should be distributed and how it should be justified. By the 1970s, most of us would have been outraged by the mere idea that a person's real wage should stay the same for a decade, let alone actually decline. Yet the USA shows that this can once again happen.

'Next time round they will have to find a new euphemism for 'slump', since 'recession' no longer sounds milder and better'

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◀ **tre... Some of them envisaged a constitutional crisis, rather than an industrial confrontation, as the eventual outcome of Thatcherism.'**
(**Peter Jenkins**, *The Guardian*, 3.11.1982)

Nov 1982: In 'A Long Haul' Stuart Hall analyses the underlying reasons for Labour's crisis.
Dec 1982: A long feature appears in the *Financial Times* by Malcolm Rutherford, the first to understand the true significance of *Marxism Today*.

'One of the most interesting developments in current British politics is taking place in the pages of *Marxism Today*... The issue at stake is whether the British Left will continue to disintegrate or whether, partly through *Marxism Today*, it can re-establish itself on a new basis.'
(**Malcolm Rutherford**, *Financial Times*, 23.12.1982)

Jun 1983: Thatcher triumphs again in the general election. Publication of *Marxism Today*'s second book, *The Politics Of Thatcherism*. Interview with Neil Kinnock.

Oct 1983: Eric Hobsbawm, in 'Labour's Lost Millions' – an analysis of the reasons for Labour's election defeat – suggests Labour needs a pact with the centre parties to win the next election. It becomes the pivotal text in Labour's election post-mortem. Neil Kinnock sings its praises.

Five years ago the question was raised in this journal whether 'the forward march of Labour' had been halted. This led to a long debate... two things strike me about it: first the sheer refusal of some of the Left to look unwelcome facts in the face... and second the failure of even the gloomiest among us to appreciate the rate and distance of Labour's imminent retreat.
(**Eric Hobsbawm**, *Labour's Lost Millions*)

Oct 1984: Neil Kinnock is interviewed by Eric Hobsbawm.
Nov 1984: *Marxism Today* holds its second weekend event – 'Left Alive' – which includes jazz dance, jogging and rock climbing, as well as political discussions and workshops. 2500 people attend. Debates between Ken Livingstone and Beatrix Campbell, ▶

'People are beginning to move out of Los Angeles the way they have long moved out of New York'

For a generation, the welfare and social security systems of most developed countries supplemented earnings and sheltered the economically weak or unlucky to a far greater extent than ever before. More than this, paid for by tax revenues which rose with the vast growth of the economies, they became more comprehensive and generous. Maternity benefits, for instance, which in the 1950s were paid, on average, for 12 weeks, had been raised by the 1970s to six months in Germany, 31 weeks in Italy and 35 weeks in Finland. In fact, such 'transfer payments' came to be a major part of household incomes – over a third in France in the early 1980s. It is doubtful whether this expansion could have continued at the same rate even if there had been no slump. In any case, as the rate of economic growth in the capitalist world fell dramatically after the early 70s, and tax revenues no longer kept pace with expenditures, the cost of social security, as a percentage of national resources, rose. As capitalist profits were squeezed, business bitterly resented its cost. Hence the attacks on the welfare state in the 1980s, notably in the Reaganite USA and Thatcherite Britain. Poverty in the midst of plenty is, once again, with us.

Again, for a generation, the fluctuations of boom and slump, the trade cycles which constitute the basic rhythm of the capitalist economy, seemed to have lost their jagged edges. Slumps were little more than mild dips in the rising curve of economic growth; booms merely accentuated its rise. But good old-fashioned slumps of the kind that only the elderly remembered in the 1970s are visibly with us again, even if politicians and their spokespeople shy away from comparing what happened in the early 1980s, and again today, with the 1930s. Capitalism can no longer rely on continuous growth.

Exactly why capitalism, to everyone's surprise, including its own, entered a golden age after the second world war (the French call it 'the 30 glorious years') is a question on which historians and economists still debate. Nor is there a consensus about why this era ended in the early 1970s. But there can be no doubt that it did end, and that since its end the capitalist world economy has been going through an era of troubles. The rate of growth of its world output in the 1980s was less than half that of the 1960s; the rate of growth of world trade had fallen even more. There is no call for apocalyptic forecasts, even though eastern Europe and the USSR show that troubled but quite operational economic systems can go to pieces suddenly when some non-economic shock disrupts them. Capitalism will presumably get over this period of secular crisis, as it got over similar periods in the past, even its dark age between the wars. But I would hazard two guesses. The golden decades of a capitalism without serious economic and social problems won't come back, and capitalism will need to be reformed yet again, as in the Keynesian era after slump and world war.

This is the ironic paradox behind the rise of Reaganism, Thatcherism and the neo-liberal economic ultras of the 1970s and 1980s. They claimed to save the world from the forces of public ownership, bureaucracy, welfare states and socialism which strangled the economy. In fact, what they attacked was the reformed postwar capitalism which had produced the golden age that ended in the 70s. They attacked the contradictions of the most successful phase of capitalism there has ever been, because even that generated its own era of crises; and they were themselves symptoms of these contradictions.

For if one thing should have been clear from the start, and was in fact demonstrated by the attempts to put neo-liberal economics into practice in both West and East (and not least in the US and Britain), it was that economic policies based exclusively on the unrestrained free market do not produce economic growth and internationally competitive economies, and they incur a horrendous social cost. Forty years ago, every government of a capitalist country, most of their big businessmen and practically all economists took this for granted. It is still self-evidently true.

That is why, even among the economists, the fashion for pure free market neo-liberalism has been rapidly waning. It is yesterday's truth, though one which still determines the selection of Nobel prize laureates in economics. What is wrong with capitalism, or, for that matter, with the old centrally-planned command economies of the Soviet type, is not put right simply by handing everything over to the unrestricted free market. This should be obvious, even in Moscow in 1991. Building or rebuilding viable, flourishing and humane economies, even for those who believe that, in the mixed economies of the future, capitalist elements should prevail, requires more than a return to suitable principles excerpted from Adam Smith. It requires an understanding of how capitalism as a world system operates, how it evolves, and what the contradictions are that keep it changing.

And that, among other things, is why there is a place for marxism today, even if no longer in the pages of *Marxism Today*.●

1 The most recent figures are for 1987. At the very peak of US economic domination in 1950, it represented 52.3% of the Oecd total.
2 *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, Sept 23 1991, 8B.
3 All these data from Lawrence Mishel and David M Frankel, 'Hard Times For Working America', *Dissent*, Spring 1991, pp 282-285.
4 Fox Butterfield, 'Record Number In US Relying On Food Stamps', *New York Times*, Oct 31 1991, pp A1, B10.
5 West Germany, Britain, Netherlands, Belgium, Denmark. Three strongly social-democratic countries – Sweden, Norway, and Austria – protected full employment better: they averaged 1.8% (1960) 2.8% (1988) and 3.6% (1983). See *Oecd Economic Outlook, Historical Statistics, 1960-1988* (Paris 1990) table 2.15.

Eric Hobsbawm is a member of Marxism Today's editorial board.

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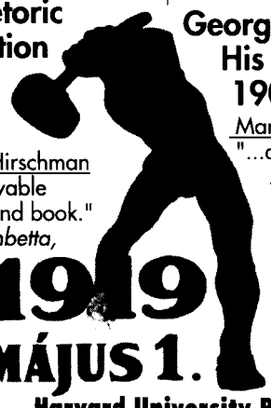

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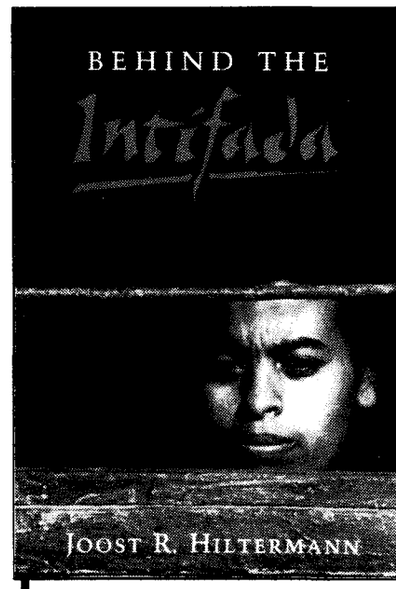

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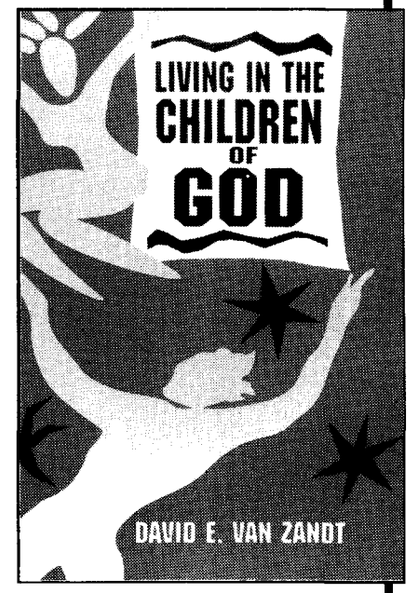

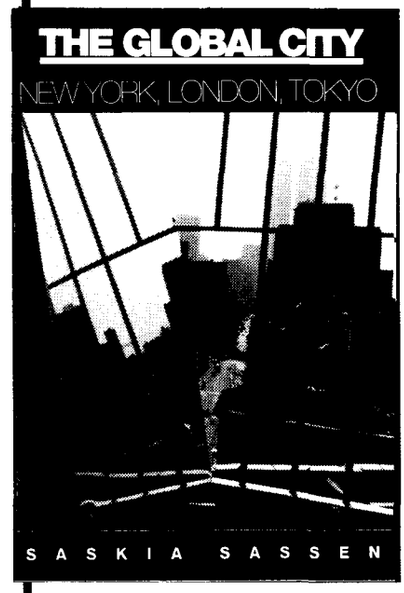

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Kings Of The Road

Andy Hall/Select

The riots of 1991 were quite different from those of 1981. **Beatrix Campbell** explains the meaning of Blackbird Leys and Meadow Well

Was it hooliganism? Was it unemployment? Was it capitalism, even? What were this year's riots about, what did they mean?

A sort of silence surrounds the questions; there's a feeling that the riots left many people speechless, while the politicians pulled words like scalps from their hip pockets, to score, to blame, but never to explain. The echo of 1981 hung like a shroud over this year's riots; people searched for parallels, and perhaps for a political issue to unite 1981 and 1991. But there wasn't one. And so we were left with 'hooliganism... unemployment...' a reminder of the poverty of politics itself.

While the clichés ricocheted around Oxford, Cardiff and Tyneside, and later Toxteth and Handsworth, predictable but useless, they nonetheless described the chasm between the people and the political domain. The iconography of the riots suggested the difference between the two decades. All the elements of familiar combustion were there: poverty, unemployment, young men on the streets, communities asset-stripped. But in 1981 there was a revolt against racist policing, and whatever a person thought about the looting, it had an economic logic – it liberated lots of domestic hardware, 'videos for the people'!

In 1991 it was the communities' communal or public buildings that were burned out. The neighbourhoods themselves were the site of young men's rage and destruction. Apart from the empty houses that were set alight week after week before the riots, leaving the estates looking like a war zone, the buildings that were burned were those that expressed the collectivities of the community – the schools, corner shops, playgrounds, and even a community centre. The young men were burning buildings that signified something dangerous to them, buildings they had refused to make their own; their acts of destruction were a revolt against their neighbours, their mothers.

The rebellion hardly touched an external economy, but it certainly expressed the young men's estrangement from the physical and emotional ecology of their own environment. Their attacks hurt most of all those within their neighbourhoods who needed those facilities, those who made use of those buildings, those who made do and managed. Torching public buildings was, however, only a grandiose episode in a longer serial – all these areas were defeated by the failure of statutory agencies to manage the dangerous entertainments of young men whose social powerlessness was being resolved in the assertion of their power against their own people. For all the sentimental hype about a suburban Silverstone at Blackbird Leys in Oxford, pulling the punters out to watch the hotters, the street theatre of the joyriders did as much to terrify as it ever did to electrify the community.

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Certainly the spectacle deserves explanation and attention. All those boys, big and little, brilliant drivers, handbreaking and swirling at speed, needing to be seen. But it was also a suicidal spectacle. After two young men were killed in a car chase near Meadow Well in Newcastle, one of their relatives, outraged at the suggestion that they were merely 'joyriders', insisted that they were professional car thieves. In his grief, the relative was insisting on something serious, the grandeur of death-defying skill and the boys' commitment to something that you might call a career. It was as if the boys' own deaths were first defied and then visited upon the very people who would be most hurt by it: their own people.

TWOCing (taking without the owner's consent) carries multiple meanings. An ethic frames its culture; there are TWOCers who wouldn't steal a car with a child's seat or a disablement card. And often an ethic frames our collective reaction to their thieving – after all, it's only a car, maybe even a company car, certainly an insured car, and definitely a smart car, so who cares?

But that only blurs the addiction beneath it. All those boys becoming men, stealing and steering an object impregnated with fantasies, doing nothing more useful than getting high on a machine, and nothing more useless than demanding to be seen doing it. There is something ultimately transgressive in their culture, because, of course, they are connoisseurs of cars – but they can't keep them.

They provide street theatre for themselves and their fans, but their brittle bravado frightens people. They menace their own neighbours by taking over the roads. Presumably they know what they are doing when they render a trip across the road to the grocer or the launderette a hazardous journey. The high performance auto-acrobatics were performed by economic victims who were not only a product of alienation; they produced it.

All of these neighbourhoods felt afflicted by disaffected, dangerous masculinity; all of them had to bear witness to men who just had to get into a car, to feel the pleasure of power. Some of them, armed with electronic scanners, were plugged into smart systems of reconnaissance; they sought out the objects of desire at city hotels or filling stations, and defied the police to come and get them. Then the police and TWOCers lock into an ancient game, a chase.

But these neighbourhoods had been trying and failing for a long time to engage the police in their own campaigns to protect the community against crime. The police presented a passive, pessimistic front to community organisations, largely sustained by women, but what they did actively respond to was the hunt.

So, somehow the police and the TWOCers mirrored each other. Both

'The police presented a passive, pessimistic front to community organisations, largely sustained by women, but what they did actively respond to was the hunt'

◀ and Stuart Hall and Tony Benn proved the biggest attractions.
Dec 1984: Beatrix Campbell and Ken Livingstone debate the impact of the GLC and its meaning for the Left.

The strength of the GLC's encounter with radicalism is that it brought to the Labour Party initiatives beyond its own imagination and beyond its own doing.
(**Beatrix Campbell**, *Politics, Pyramids And People*)

Mar 1985: Gorbachev is elected general secretary of the CPSU.
Apr 1985: NUM activists give a devastating critique of Scargill and the conduct of the miners' strike in a roundtable discussion.

I've been against mass picketing from the word go in this strike because it wasn't only an industrial battle we were in but a political battle where we should have tried to argue the case for coal against the government's strategy, and to bring this out to millions of people.
(**Alan Baker**, secretary of the Oakdale Lodge, South Wales Area of the NUM)

Jul 1985: *MT* carries its first article by a significant figure on the Right, Ferdinand Mount, about the meaning of socialism. Live Aid is held, and the GLC ceases to operate.
Nov 1985: Robin Murray's article, 'Benetton Britain', prefigures the New Times analysis.
Mar 1986: Stuart Hall interviews Jesse Jackson.
Jul 1986: *Marxism Today* organises a national women's weekend – 'Women Alive'. Over 1000 attend.
Oct 1986: *MT* is redesigned and relaunched and holds its third national weekend event – 'Left Unlimited' – which attracts nearly 4000. The 'designer socialism' tag is used to describe *MT*.

'Call them 'yummies' – young, upwardly mobile marxists. Their favourite magazine is *Marxism Today*, slick and sharply written.'
(*Wall Street Journal*)

Mar 1987: First interview with a prominent Tory MP, Edwina Currie.
Apr 1987: *MT* holds a Gramscifest. Over 1000 attend.

May 1987: Eric Hobsbawm argues the case for tactical voting in the run-up to the general election.

'The case for tactical voting was given a powerful boost yesterday by Professor Eric Hobsbawm, guru of the new eurocommunist Left, who urged voters to vote any way they have to in order to defeat Mrs Thatcher at the next election – even if it means voting for the Alliance.'
(*Guardian*, 23.4.1987)

Jun 1987: Thatcher triumphs for the third successive time in the general election. *MT* launches its Central Committee Outfitters with a range of 'clothing for autonomy'.
Oct 1987: 30th anniversary issue. The bottom falls out of the stock market.
Feb 1988: A series of articles discuss the impact of *perestroika* on eastern Europe.

The signals in Moscow are that Soviet imagination of the tolerable still stops well before a society in which the Communist Party abandoned the conventional 'leading role', or effectively shared power with a 'non-socialist' force . Alexander Dubcek, in his *Unita* interview, stated his belief that Gorbachev would never have authorised the 1968 military intervention in his country. For my part, I will wait and see for a few years before feeling able to agree with him.
(**Neal Ascherson**, *A Spectre Haunts The East*, Feb 1988)

Mar 1988: Interview with Michael Heseltine:

No-one can foresee the circumstances that will confront one, but I've always enjoyed political power and if I have an opportunity to exercise it in the interests of the Conservative Party and the country, of course I'll take it.
(**Michael Heseltine** interviewed by John Lloyd)

Oct 1988: The 'New Times' issue introduces a whole new way of looking at contemporary society. There is enormous interest. Sales, which were now over 14000, leap to over 17000 for this issue.

'Once again, the magazine *Marxism Today* has thrown down a dramatic challenge to the British Left, this time on the eve of the Labour Party conference... in its issue published today, the magazine provides, not a blueprint or a programme, but a controversial description of what is going on in the world that throws much conventional analysis out of the window. We are living, the magazine argues, in a new era. ▶

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THE SEA
BY EDWARD BOND

A young man is drowned in a violent storm, leaving his sailing companion, his fiancée and a small coastal town to come to terms with his loss.

Edward Bond's modern classic combines sharp and haunting insights with brilliant social comedy. It is set in an eccentric community, dominated by a hallucinating draper (KEN STOTT) and the formidable matriarch Mrs Rafi (JUDI DENCH).

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became kings of the road. The lads wanted and needed to be chased, most of all by the people they respected – the police. The police could be tempted into a car chase when they could not be tempted to take seriously a community dialogue with the good citizens, mostly women, who wanted a bit of traffic management and some decent detection.

Both the lads and the police, in effect, express *par excellence* cultures which have been dedicated to the exclusion of women. Both displayed a destructive or disrespectful relationship to the women who have sustained the few informal institutions of civil society in the ghettoes. For the police to respond positively would have involved not tangling with dangerous victims, but negotiating with survivors, copers, managers.

The joyriders are not universal heroes: they are victims-cum-victimisers. Joyriders prove their spectacular skill, and yet they push their own neighbourhoods to the edge of endurance. And some of them pursue their pleasure to the point of their own or some other child's extinction. These anti-heroes mark the difference between the riots of 1981 and 1991 – a decade ago they were palpably powered by rage and pain at perceived racism and economic despair.

The riots of 1991 were driven not by pain but by pride, the vanity of fragile masculinity with nothing but time on its hands and a borrowed car to break into. The joyriders cannot wear the innocence that is the necessary mantle of the martyr. Some of them are killers. Some of them will kill themselves.

Some of the 'bad boys' have just made some crap estates even worse. They are reluctant co-habitees with their mothers and Asian shopkeepers and schoolkids in municipal gulags which wear the evidence of impulses utterly at odds with each other: there is the graffiti saying some girl or other is a slag, charred houses without roofs, but next door there are gardens or balconies with autumn blooms, and then there are – or were – corner shops that represented both commerce and community.

While the boys set the place alight, the communities watched and waited as the police got their numbers up and polished their riot shields. It was very different in 1981: then the riots were a story of provocative police action. This time it was more a story of provocative inertia. In 1981 black citizens were harassed on the streets. In 1991 black shopkeepers rang the police for help, and they rang and they rang. No help came. Several were told that the best thing to do was to pack up and go. The police could not or would not protect them.

These neighbourhoods have not only been economically abandoned, they have been shunned by police forces which blame them for the consequences. Policing and the protection of people from the dangerousness of their own neighbourhoods emerged as the key terms in the non-debate about the riots. Police tactics had changed. This was not 1980s Brixton or Toxteth or Orgreave. But even the most passionate defenders of law and order must have wondered why it took them so long, why they waited hours before massing their boys and their armour while shops, homes, community centres, electricity depots and playgrounds burned.

'A decade ago the rioters were palpably powered by rage and pain at perceived racism and economic despair'

At best, all those poor shopkeepers got were a few kind words from responsible citizens whose communities they have served, but which they have been forced to evacuate. These good citizens were defending Asian and Chinese shopkeepers from the racism within their own communities, the racism from which the police have always failed to protect them because they are infected with it themselves.

The eruption of the riots drew attention to the economic catastrophe which is these estates' everyday life. A bit of municipal modernisation, new lagging, fences here, landscaping there, cannot survive the hard fact that their population has been deprived of any possibility of sustaining itself economically. At least legally.

Blackbird Leys in Oxford lives while 35,000 jobs at the adjacent Pressed Steel Fisher and Cowley car plants died. Scotswood, alongside the Tyne, used to be synonymous with Vickers, with men's work. Now there's no work – except endless housework, of course.

How can these estates survive as sociable places when the cost of access to the culture that surrounds them is prohibitive? And how can they feel commodious when there's a criminal element that is the estate's own sons? There is a swift answer: they can't.

The government's reaction was cruel, without qualification: Michael Heseltine, the Messiah of the 1980s, had become the Midas of the 1990s. He made no friends when he targeted North Tyneside council, the landlords of Meadow Well, because although its management of the estate is less than laudable, the evidence is all around of a working environment laid to waste. You look from Meadow Well across the Tyne and you want to weep.

His own regime's culpability is palpable in the last year at Meadow Well – the poll tax capping of North Tyneside council was by any standard punitive, and it has laid to waste much of the welfare infrastructure on estates all around. These entire neighbourhoods have been spoiled, but it is the behaviour of the men and boys that has tipped them into dangerousness. Some commentators lamented the lads' loss of an appropriate role model – you know, fathers in overalls with wage packets, filling in the pools. The demise of the working man, the father, somehow explained the social crisis. What remained unexplained was why masculinity takes such spectacularly destructive forms when it loses its power.

The TWOCing and the torching of communal facilities focused the young men's anger on their own people. The images and identities the young men were creating were the apogee of destructiveness and difference. The refusal to co-operate, to cope, was the antithesis of the efforts of exactly those people who sought to manage a life and make a community.

These different responses to it by diverse groups within the community tell us something important: they disturb the very notion of 'community'. The integrity of the term is gone. Quite simply, it has disintegrated. United only by geography, the riot territories bear all the internal injuries of communities divided so profoundly that it is no longer possible to talk of community. Like class, it is not a self-evident category; it does not explain the contours of their conflicts.

It is not that class and community don't mean anything anymore, it is that they are also riven by conflicts of interest, between men and women, black and white, young and old. The recent riots have shown that notions like class and community can no longer sustain the *transcendent* qualities of homogeneity and solidarity that have been claimed for them. They probably never did.

For sure, class and community are not a simple guide to the internal dramas of neighbourhoods like Blackbird Leys in Oxford, Ely in Cardiff and Scotswood and Meadow Well in Tyneside and later in Toxteth, where there wasn't a riot, but there was a rebellion. The riots revealed what men and women do differently – shortly after the Newcastle riots, joyriding killed another child in Toxteth. There the mothers took the law into their own hands and put up a road block. It was the mothers who went to meetings about the problems of young people in Meadow Well, it was the mothers who initiated the plethora of credit unions in Scotswood and Meadow Well, a self-help source of capital for whole neighbourhoods denied access to respectable credit. And it was the women who set up a food co-op on Meadow Well when the shops were burned out. And it was the women who were campaigning to get the Tyneside and Toxteth police to intervene, to prevent the criminalisation of their communities.

What this tells us is not that women are nicer than men, but that men and women inhabit gendered traditions which they themselves reproduce: the beleaguered ambition to live in a community is sustained by the mothers. And it is they who have felt abandoned by the state and the police in their effort to create the discipline of communal culture.

Ultimately, the calming and creative reconstruction of these communities demanded something from both the police and the young men, something which seemed impossible: co-operation with women.●

Beatrix Campbell is a broadcaster and journalist.

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Revenge Of The 60s

The radicalism of the 60s, **Angela McRobbie** argues, has proved more resilient than we ever imagined

The possibility that the Thatcher years could end on an upbeat note for the Left presented itself to me suddenly during the discussion which followed the tv re-enactment of the *Oz* trial. Germaine Greer, despite the intervening years of ideas verging on the batty, is grinning, confident and politically sensible. She dares the squirming David Dimbleby to say the 'C' word. It was in the title of a magazine she edited in the 60s. She says it. He doesn't. Come on, David, she teases. Say it. He grits his teeth and the word comes tumbling out at the speed of light. The moment is rich with cultural meaning. Twenty years later, Greer and Neville still enjoy stirring things up. They are both outsiders, and Dimbleby is the insider. He is the sort of person who, at university, would have scurried past those long-haired types handing out their subversive literature. Much too loud. Too messy.

It was the Greer generation, and those who came after her, who were the most long-standing targets of Thatcherism. The Thatcherites were also outsiders, but they too hated the noise and the clamour of the late 60s and early 70s. They couldn't bear the social science and arts students who refused the disconnectedness of the universities and transformed them (and later the polytechnics) into places where everything, rather than nothing, could happen. Perhaps even from the same socially-dislocated backgrounds as their radical counterparts, the young Thatcherites swore they would get even with these 'protesters' who wasted the tax-payers' money, who staged happenings rather than going to class, who talked a lot about sex and contraception, and who, it seemed, were willing to risk their future careers for the fun of the moment and the 'revolution' of everyday life.

It was against what later became the 'radical professionalism' of these same protesters that Thatcher raged most relentlessly. What happened in the 70s, in the social services, in the arts and media, in the law and in education, was that what once seemed like silly ideas were now able to develop and take root, entering into and informing 'good practice' inside the institutions. These new social ideologies did not simply supplant the old ones in one stroke. The institutions became sites of intense contest, and it was here that social change took place. Everything was up for grabs. Nor was there any clear unity on the part of the newcomers. But certain ideas and values remained constant: democratic principles, the extension of social opportunity and provision, and the commitment to the welfare state took preference over career advancement and money. And on top of this, to be worth doing, the work inside the institutions had to be enjoyable. It had to be an extension of what one might otherwise be doing anyway, for the love of it (setting up arts workshops, working with deprived youth, ex-prisoners, tenants, claimants).

This utopian ideal took a severe battering in the Thatcher decade. It wasn't just the 'cutbacks'. The financial constraints were real, but it was the ideological onslaught led by Thatcher, with the help of the *Daily Mail*, and the Murdoch empire, which sought to devalue and discredit and demolish what was left of the impulse to participate in change, to empower the powerless and, most importantly, to politicise everyday life outside party politics.

The success of Thatcher, as Martin Jacques and Stuart Hall have pointed out, was that, as she attempted to vanquish what was left of 60s radicalism, she simultaneously re-politicised everyday life by 'going over the heads of the professionals' and forging new alliances with social groups who either distrusted and disliked the younger radical professionals (ie, the older white working class/lower middle class), or people whose children were seen to be victims of the changes which were sweeping through the institutions (ie, parents of school-age children), or those who were themselves young and who had grown up knowing virtually no politics other than Thatcher's own (ie, the generation who became known as 'Thatcher's children').

But if the new cultural and social Left made real mistakes, if on occasion it got carried away to the extent of failing to listen to the voices of disagreement and discontent within its own community and the client populations of the institutions it managed – parents, consumers, victims of crime, children and young people – then it is now becoming apparent that, despite all it had going for it at the time, the rhetoric of Thatcherism was much less sustainable than it seemed, and less sustainable than the language of post-60s radicalism. If a whole series of institutions suddenly, almost overnight, had been converted into speaking the new language of 'market forces', 'corporate values' and 'entrepreneurialism', then that language itself has proved more malleable, more flexible, more open to reinterpretation by the Left (and the liberals) inside the institutions than the dead hand of Thatcherite bureaucracy could have imagined. Granted, a new era of policies and practices was ushered in, some of which were more brutal than others; but as Kenneth Baker and then Kenneth Clarke, for example, have been forced to realise, values other than theirs have proved difficult, if not impossible, to dislodge. The resistance has been too great.

And as for the older white working class and lower middle class, they grew older and needed the social and health services. For everybody, the return to family values proved socially, sexually and economically unviable. Alone in her glory, Thatcher could never, ever, bring herself to address 'women' as one of her target groups, thus leaving the Greer generation, gradually, and in conditions of adversity, to lay the groundwork for what has since become an *unconditional*

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premise of cultural and political life today: sexual emancipation.

Even for the so-called Thatcher generation, yuppie *lifestyle* and the image of hard-nosed individualism did not reckon with the *lifecycle*. For many relatively well-off young couples, it was a matter of choosing between a house or a baby. The spectre of repossession might even account for the surprising increase in the abortion rate in the last five years among this sector of the population. And as soon as children did arrive, a new dependency on health, welfare, educational and social services came into play. Only the super-rich could afford to go it alone in the private sector. And for the less well-off, even for those young people initially sympathetic to Thatcherist ideas, they could not afford to leave home; if they were students, they could hardly manage from week to week without additional support from their parents.

In other words, the Tories have absolutely no constituency left within the young population of Britain today. They have exhausted this source to the extent that their interests, values and rhetoric simply do not coincide with any but the tiniest minority of youth. (For whom is John Major a role model, despite all the talk about his being a Brixton boy?) The 'new Right' in youth terms may have been vocal on occasion, but where does its broader base for support lie? Nowhere, apart from the odd skinhead faction, and even they can no longer rely on a broader ideological climate of racism in the UK to give credence to their aggressive actions. (This is not to say that racism no longer exists; rather that the particular articulation between racist groups and their assumed broader sources of support can no longer be taken for granted.)

'The yuppie lifestyle did not reckon with the lifecycle. For many relatively well-off young couples, it was a matter of choosing between a house or a baby'

What the longevity, against the odds, of late-60s inspired ideas shows is that the dynamics of political change have, over the last 20 years, taken place inside culture and the public sector or 'social' institutions. I mean culture here in the broadest sense to encompass this fabric of everyday life, the noise of loud music in the background, the fashion images on the pages of the glossy magazines, the points at which real lives intersect with cultural forms and commodities, the point at which new patterns and 'structures of feeling' find expression and surface right along and across the landscape of the social. This *is* society, and Thatcher was simply wrong to say it didn't exist.

The issue at stake, then, is the relation between culture and politics. It is in culture that we see long-term and deep social change take root, and it is also in culture that opposition to certain kinds of change is manifest, whether this opposition is planned or else seemingly organic, the result of buried but tenacious discontent. What is significant in 1991 is that the most powerful hegemonic rhetoric of our times (that of Thatcher-

◀ **These are 'New Times'... (*Marxism Today*'s) picture of the changing world ... is likely to stand as the essential backcloth to all contemporary political debate.'**
(**Richard Gott**, *The Guardian*, 28.9.1988)

'*Marxism Today* offers the most coherent and stimulating effort I've yet come across to grapple... with the New Times in which we live.'
(**Hugo Young**, *The Guardian*, 29.9.1988)

Nov 1988: Interview with Edward Heath.

'Mr Heath, in the long interview with the 'designer communism' magazine, rejects the view that Thatcherism will remain the Conservative orthodoxy into the next century and says the tradition he embodies will come back.'
(*Glasgow Herald*)

'*Marxism Today* is far and away the best socialist journal in the land. The most remarkable of its many virtues is that it actually understands Thatcherism and the ideas that underpin popular capitalism.'
(**Brian Walden**, *The Sunday Times*, 4.12.1988)

Apr 1989: *Marxism Today* produces an issue entirely devoted to Europe.

Britain has never worn its European hat with much enthusiasm. And the Left has been no exception. But there is now a dawning recognition that the old insularity will no longer do. Unless we change, we will be cast in the role of spectators rather than actors in a process of extraordinary historic importance which will be one of the great themes of the 90s.
(Leader, *Marxism Today*)

Jun 1989: Tanks roll into Tiananmen Square.
Oct 1989: *Marxism Today* organises a New Times weekend event attended by 1500 people, and in November, its third book, *New Times*, is published.
Nov 1989: The velvet revolution brings sweeping change to Czechoslovakia, and in Germany, the Berlin Wall is breached. With unfailing regularity, the revolutions of 1989 occur just after *Marxism Today* goes to press.

Britain is heading for a recession and the going will be rough. Given the time-scale involved, the Tories have little scope for engineering a convincing pre-election boom, and the next election is likely to be fought against a grim economic background.
(Leader by **Bob Rowthorn**, *No Such Miracle*)

Feb 1990: Marx appears on the cover, this time with egg on his face.
Aug 1990: Saddam Hussein invades Kuwait.
Nov 1990: Thatcher resigns in the Tory leadership challenge.

The chances of Labour inheriting the mantle of the post-Thatcher era look better with every passing day. But... a party which lacks an original analysis of society, which has no clear idea of where it wants society to go, and whose project is so obviously derivative, is likely to run rapidly out of steam.
(**Stuart Hall** and **Martin Jacques**, *March Without Vision*, Dec 1990)

Feb 1991: Interview with Chris Patten which became the key document for analysing the new Major government.

If we can find, more successfully than we've been able to in the past, an English rhetoric for what seems to come so naturally to the German Christian Democrats, namely the social market economy, then we're on to a very substantial winner.
(**Chris Patten** interviewed by David Marquand)

Mar 1991: *Marxism Today* produces a special issue criticising the Gulf war.

'*Marxism Today* is now a moderate paper, and far more realistic and worth reading than anything that comes from the Labour Party.'
(**Norman Lamont**, Chancellor of the Exchequer, replying to the debate on the Financial Statement, *Hansard*, March 1991)

May 1991: Widely-acclaimed special issue on the public sector.

'Public-sector perestroika involves post-Fordist decentralisation, reintroducing a sense of community among workers and redefining jobs ... *Marxism Today* is emerging as the Left's most creative as well as iconoclastic think tank.
(*The Guardian*, leader, 23.4.1991)

Aug 1991: Gorbachev is temporarily removed from power by the Moscow coup.
Nov 1991: In a powerful interview with *Marxism Today*, Sir John Harvey-Jones suggests that he is 'just a retired old fart'.●

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ism) and arguably the most successful, should so suddenly find itself without some glaringly obvious 'home' in society. Instead what we find is that the discourses of 80s radical conservatism are quite out of touch with the ways in which we live today. So that, for example, all the time that the Tories were preaching the return to family values, the family itself was undergoing what now seem like quite irreversible changes. And as most people realise, these changes are by no means a wholly bad thing, even when the Tory press raises the spectre of fatherless children living in single-parent poverty. Hardly a man or woman in the country has not experienced, directly or indirectly, the benefits of no longer having to get married because a baby is on the way, or no longer having to stay married when the relationship breaks down. Choice is not only a keyword for the Conservatives, but has also taken on particular meaning in the whole arena of sexual politics.

Where is the moral majority in this scenario? How has it responded to those changes whose origins lie in late-60s radicalism and which, over 20 years later, seem to be on the brink of being simply taken for granted, which are certainly given space on the airwaves and in the press, and indeed celebrated on British television (as in the recent *Saturday Night Out* programmes which looked back to 20 years of gay liberation)? The answer must be that the moral majority now seems to comprise only the sort of eccentrics and obsessives whom the Tories can simply not risk letting loose in public places for fear of what they will come out with. And the crusading zeal of people like Victoria Gillick and Mary Whitehouse seems to have run itself into the ground. Where Aids constitutes a life threat to us all, the idea of innocence or of shielding young people from the facts of life, or indeed of promoting lifelong monogamy, become themselves dangerous strategies. While a good deal was said by the Left about the moral majority, and the danger it posed to democratic values, the fact is that it is not at all clear who constituted this majority. It certainly did not have any noticeable presence in the institutions or in the professional bodies or organisations. If it was the people who were the moral majority, then the last 10 years have shown that the boundaries of their morality have moved way beyond those prescribed by the Tories in the early 80s.

Cultural politics could be seen then as a resource, *the* resource for disempowered and disenfranchised groups, of which black people, as Paul Gilroy has argued, are the most obvious example. Post-60s cultural politics exists in relation to education, and higher eduction in particular. If it is in culture that things are felt and thought through collectively, and if it is in the emergent forms and expressions that this complex process reaches out to a wider audience, then it is in education that another kind of space is opened up, where what seemed like natural or spontaneous or simply unconscious events and phenomena can be reflected upon and understood. In this sense, both culture and a kind of educational practice which allows for this kind of reflectiveness can be seen as sources of *social mobility*, in the good sense. Transforming higher education by widening its availability across the mass of the population, and finding ways of drawing on social experience as a means of reactivating the pleasure of learning, would produce in the longer term not only a better-trained, more flexible and above all more socially, sexually and racially-mixed workforce, but would also provide a basis for the *reproduction* of the sort of intellectual culture of which Thatcher was so fearful and so consistently antagonistic towards, and which she almost completely decimated.

'The moral majority now seems to comprise only the sort of eccentrics whom the Tories cannot risk letting loose in public places for fear of what they will come out with'

How else might the popularity of culture in Britain be developed as a means of empowerment? How can culture extend the field of what Ernesto Laclau has recently called 'democratic antagonism'? One answer might lie simply in valuing and investing in culture and in recognising the media and the arts as legitimate spaces where otherwise unrepresented or buried 'antagonisms' can and do find creative expression.●

Angela McRobbie teaches at Ealing College, London

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Martin Jacques bids a fond farewell to *Marxism Today*

The Last Word

I remember being asked whether I would become the full-time editor of *Marxism Today*. The year was 1977. The benefactor was Gordon McLennan, then general secretary of the Communist Party. I was an academic at Bristol University and deeply involved in the CP. It was the high point of eurocommunism, a time of optimism when I and others like me believed that the party could be changed into something different. (If only we had known about the Moscow gold...)

I teetered on the brink, agonised and then agreed. It felt like jumping off the edge of a cliff. One part of me thought I was crazy. And I answered in the affirmative for all the wrong reasons. I saw editing *MT* as a way of getting on the inside of the CP, a better position from which to change it. *MT* held little attraction. I had never shown the slightest interest in journalism, and *MT* was then a forbidding, quarto-sized, graphic-less journal designed for the party faithful.

I became a member of the CP's political committee. I had arrived at the top, and I hated it. There was no space for someone like me, an intellectual, a revisionist and a free spirit. Nobody listened. It was dominated by old men, and a counter-revolution was in progress; the limits of eurocommunism had been reached. In 1979 I was booted off the political committee. I began to realise that the eurocommunist party we had dreamt of in the 70s was a forlorn hope.

My response was to throw myself into *MT*. Here I had some room to manoeuvre. No one bothered about it very much. *MT* was extremely low in the CP's priorities, a journal for party intellectuals, selling around 3,500.

I slowly developed a concept of what *MT* might be. I wanted it to be about the politics of the day, not an esoteric journal of theory. My inspiration was twofold. Firstly, the feature journalism of the *Financial Times*, and in particular the writing of David Watt, the best political commentator of the 70s. And secondly, Antonio Gramsci. *MT* had to occupy the high ground. It had to be better than anyone else on British politics, more profound, more perceptive. And its project, of course, was the renewal of the Left. It was all about hegemony, I thought. Sounds a bit grand, I know, but that was the concept. I had precious little idea what it actually meant in practice...

The resources were not propitious. There was me. And there was a secretary who worked two days a week. Her name was Minnie, she was 75 years old and she made me realise you could still have sex appeal into your fourth age. There was another typist of 65 who worked one day a week, and finally there was Doris, who was 81 and spent four hours a week on subscriptions and advertising. Meet the team.

We did possess, however, what turned out to be a formidable intellectual resource. During the 70s, the dissenting academy which had grown up in and around the Communist Party – imbibing Gramsci, going eurocommunist, breaking with stalinism, taking feminism seriously, and spawning what was in its own small way a formidable institution of its time, the annual Communist University – became the most interesting and sophisticated school of thinking on the Left. It was open-minded, restless, heretical and promiscuous. It provided some of the culture for the new *MT*.

Then there were the writers. The new concept of the magazine meant blooding a completely new team of writers. Previously they were drawn overwhelmingly from the party faithful. I began a hungry search for writers who might turn my dream into a reality. I was rarely turned down, even though we never paid a penny and I frequently gave the writers a hard time, drafting and redrafting ad nauseam. There were two reasons for this. Firstly, the magazine began to acquire a reputation and cachet which made people want to write for it. Secondly, we offered people a different form of writing: academics were required to write about more concrete problems, and in a more accessible manner, than academia asked of them, and journalists were called upon to write at greater length and in a more structured way than newspaper journalism demanded. *MT*, in other words, provided a unique outlet.

But *MT*'s initial energy was, above all, political. What I wanted to do was apply the insights provided by Gramsci and the dissenting academy to contemporary British politics. I was already clear that something pretty profound was happening, that the postwar era was coming to an end, the Right was regrouping and the labour movement was in decline. It was my luck that two fine intellectuals, Eric Hobsbawm and Stuart Hall, who at that time I barely knew, were thinking along not dissimilar lines. We published Hobsbawm's article, 'The Forward March of Labour Halted?', which argued that the labour movement was in long-term decline, in September 1978, and Hall's 'Great Moving Right Show', which contended that Thatcherism was a quite new political formation, in January 1979. These two articles savagely contradicted the conventional wisdom of the time, and set the fundamental parameters of left debate until well into the late 80s.

Alongside *MT*'s political project grew a journalistic one: to transform the journal into a magazine, to make it attractive to a much wider range of readers, to make it available in newsagents, to carry advertising, to enlarge the staff. In October 1979 we appeared with graphics and a larger format for the first time. In October 1980 WH Smith agreed to give it a trial run in a number of outlets. We passed our 11 plus. We had lift-off... despite the crazy title. (I remember George Moore, who was then in charge of retail for WH Smith, saying to me that the two most inappropriately-named titles on the news-shelf were *The Economist* and *Marxism Today*; but then those who dreamt up our title way back in 1957 never thought it was intended for anyone but the party faithful...)

In October 1981 we became nationally available in newsagents for the first time. Sales shot up to 9,000. I rubbed my eyes in disbelief. We had, in a modest

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kind of way, made it. The arguments the magazine had been propounding for several years suddenly became accessible to a much wider audience. *MT* was now an important political player.

From 1981, the Left began to divide between the fundamentalists and the revisionists, between those who felt that full-blooded socialism was the appropriate response to Thatcherism and those who argued that a much deeper re-examination of what the Left stood for was required. Put crudely, the Bennites, CP stalinists, the trotskyist groups and conservative forces were on one side and *MT*, the eurocommunists, the soft Left and the Kinnockites were on the other. *MT* was to play a critical role for two reasons. Firstly, it articulated more clearly and profoundly than anyone else the arguments for the revisionist case and, what is more, had been doing so for a long time. Secondly, from the outset it had been prepared to think the unthinkable and break with the blinkered mind-set which dominated so much of the Left. It was open-minded, iconoclastic (to use a favourite word of one of *MT*'s great iconoclasts, Bea Campbell), and enormously self-confident.

The magazine's influence grew and grew, along with its sales. But it nearly did not survive. In September 1982 it was the subject of an unprecedented attack from the CP industrial organiser and the editor of the *Morning Star*. The ostensible reason was an article by Tony Lane attacking the corruption of shop stewards. The conservative might of the CP's industrial base swung into action. Within a couple of weeks it was joined by a letter from the CPSU central committee attacking an article we published in the same issue by the then dissident Roy Medvedev (except the stupid pen-pusher in the Kremlin who wrote the resolution confused Roy, who lived in Moscow, with his twin brother Zhores, who lived in London, referring to Zhores as the author... no wonder they couldn't organise a coup). But we survived – just. A majority of the CP backed us against the stalinists, partly out of conviction and empathy, and partly because we were far and away the most successful thing the CP was associated with. These, though, were desperate times. *MT* seemed to be under attack from just about every quarter on the Left. The problem for the Great Defenders of the Faith, however, was that we were right. Slowly the fury began to abate. All fell silent on the Left Front. The *MT* wisdom slowly became the new common sense.

But the magazine faced a more fundamental problem. I was frequently asked during this period: 'OK, we agree with your critique, but what is to be done?' And the answer? Waffle, silence, cliché, pause. We didn't really know. Fair cop. *MT* was brilliant at critique, but that was about it. We needed to move on. But how? If only we knew how...

In May 1988, we organised a small weekend seminar for a select band of authors at a country house near Chesterfield. By this time we had become a dab hand at organising highly imaginative and very large public weekend events, but, strangely, this was our first foray into the high-powered seminar. It was a weekend that blew our collective minds. The upshot was the special 'New Times' issue of October 1988. We were witnessing, it argued, an epochal shift in the character of advanced societies, the passage from a homogeneous, mass-production society to something more flexible, differentiated and segmented. The buzz-phrase was post-Fordism. It was a moment of discovery, a real breakthrough. In some ways it was the magazine's most creative moment, because it involved the biggest break with our own traditions and conventional left categories. We began to float free. And it unleashed the search for a new generation of writers, and the rise to prominence of Charlie Leadbeater and Geoff Mulgan.

But the New Times project was rudely interrupted after only a few months by Tiananmen Square and the events in eastern Europe. 1989 was a tough year for the magazine. Eastern Europe collapsed with such speed that a monthly always looked hopelessly out of date. And in any case, *MT* was always much better at the domestic than the international, because you can get by on the domestic front with scant resources in a way that is impossible with foreign coverage. Eastern Europe, though, presented us with a more fundamental problem. No one who knew us well had ever associated the magazine with stalinism and the communist world. But in 1989 the association was irresistible – because of our title and our relationship with the CP. Throughout the 80s, our sales had risen; now for the first time they fell, not by much, but they fell. Meanwhile, we tried to make sense of the collapse of communism. The range of our writers grew apace. We became a very broad church indeed.

The decision to close the magazine was not a product of 1989. To tell you the truth, it dates back to 1987. I was just recovering from a long bout of ill-health, and I began to realise in my bones that my time was up. I wanted to move on. I was tired, I was fed up with being broke, and I wanted a new challenge. But what about the mag? Although it had grown beyond recognition, with a staff of nine full-time equivalents, we never had any money. And the staff were paid miserly wages, which meant we attracted very bright

people in their 20s who left by the age of 30 – apart from old grandad of course (that's me). This was, as we had demonstrated with such flair in the 80s, a viable culture for a limited period. But not indefinitely. Moreover the events of 1989 made it abundantly clear that our title was now an albatross and the relationship with the CP a busted flush – both of which we had realised for some time, but now they came to haunt us.

In so many ways it was the end of an era. It seemed like the moment to close. I have always hated institutions that don't know when to call it a day. Britain is littered with them, and the Left is a particularly brilliant exponent of the art. I wanted the magazine to close as it had lived – with intelligence, energy, courage and imagination. No one can claim that the magazine has been on anything other than top form in 1991. We finish with one of our greatest issues ever. How else would you expect us to say goodbye? *Marxism Today* is dead. Long live *Marxism Today*!●

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Geraldine Bedell on the new hegemonic project for the Left

Royalism Today

The Left is in crisis. There are two reasons for this: not enough people are wearing Italian suits, and there has been no serious attempt to understand soap opera. The failure to buy Armani is symptomatic of a wider crisis: the Left has also failed to embrace the mobile phone, the Mont Blanc pen, polenta, advertising, fast cars, Japanese electronics, champagne and earning lots of money. Small wonder its appeal has crumbled.

These failings are particularly depressing at a time when the collapse of the Eastern bloc offers the possibility of epochal shifts in global political, cultural and economic life. The urgent task for the Left therefore, must now be to find a radical project which comprehends style, soap opera, and the collapse of communism. Yet there is, in fact, already a political movement which combines these things uniquely and supremely: the royal family.

A truly hegemonic class, in Gramsci's definition, maintains a position of national leadership by gaining the consent of other classes, continually adapting its system of alliances to changing conditions. To argue that the royal family is undemocratic is consequently to miss Gramsci's central point: that though majorities may be constructed in part through shared realities of class, income, or race, they pre-eminently derive from the ability of one political group to articulate views that appear to speak, if not for all, at least for a sizeable majority.

And this is what the royal family does. Like all good soap operas, *The Royals* offers characters and situations which reflect all the triumphs and vicissitudes of ordinary people. As Norman Tebbit has observed, Prince Charles can align himself effectively with those who have got no job, because in a way he's got no job. The Queen Mother can align herself with gamblers, Fergie with slimmers, Princess Diana with Dire Straits fans, the Queen with corgi owners who wear headscarves. Princess Margaret articulates the political needs of divorced people who like Caribbean holidays; Andrew of men who build hideous houses. Princess Michael is a paradigm of, and spokesperson for, all those whose books are attacked for plagiarism. It is a formidable range of appeal.

Royalism is essentially adaptive, producing a William or Beatrice as required to articulate the values of the next generation, creating a complex system of alliances, criss-crossing the nation and binding it together. No political party can do this; and in the absence of electoral reform, no other group can hope similarly to speak for all of Britain.

As Gramsci observed, a hegemonic class combines its own interests with those stemming from democratic issues to achieve hegemony – so Fergie combines her desire to make money with the public's interest in everything she does to flog her *Budgie The Helicopter* books.

Meanwhile, the royals' many and shifting identities enact the postmodern condition, what Jean-Francois Lyotard called 'the collapse of faith in the great meta-narratives'. Prince Edward's rejection of the masculinist marines for the theatre shows it is no longer possible to see the traditional heterosexual male as an unproblematic norm. Princess Diana's rise through the family reflects women's changing expectations; her fashion consciousness mirrors the social map of desire of girls in Top Shop up and down the land.

Sometimes, of course, the royals' policies are ill thought-through, poorly-explained and ineptly imposed. But when Princess Diana clasps the hand of an Aids patient, or Prince Charles visits Brick Lane, the family becomes a healing force, recognising that British society and politics have become imprinted by the ethnic factor, and viruses.

The Windsors thus offer hope that a post-Fordist Left can have meaning: their public recognition of marginalised, subordinated and often despised groups – theatre tea boys, people who wear crowns – is about saying these groups too are 'us'. When Prince Charles talks to plants, he speaks for that sizeable part of the population which thinks it may be going mad.

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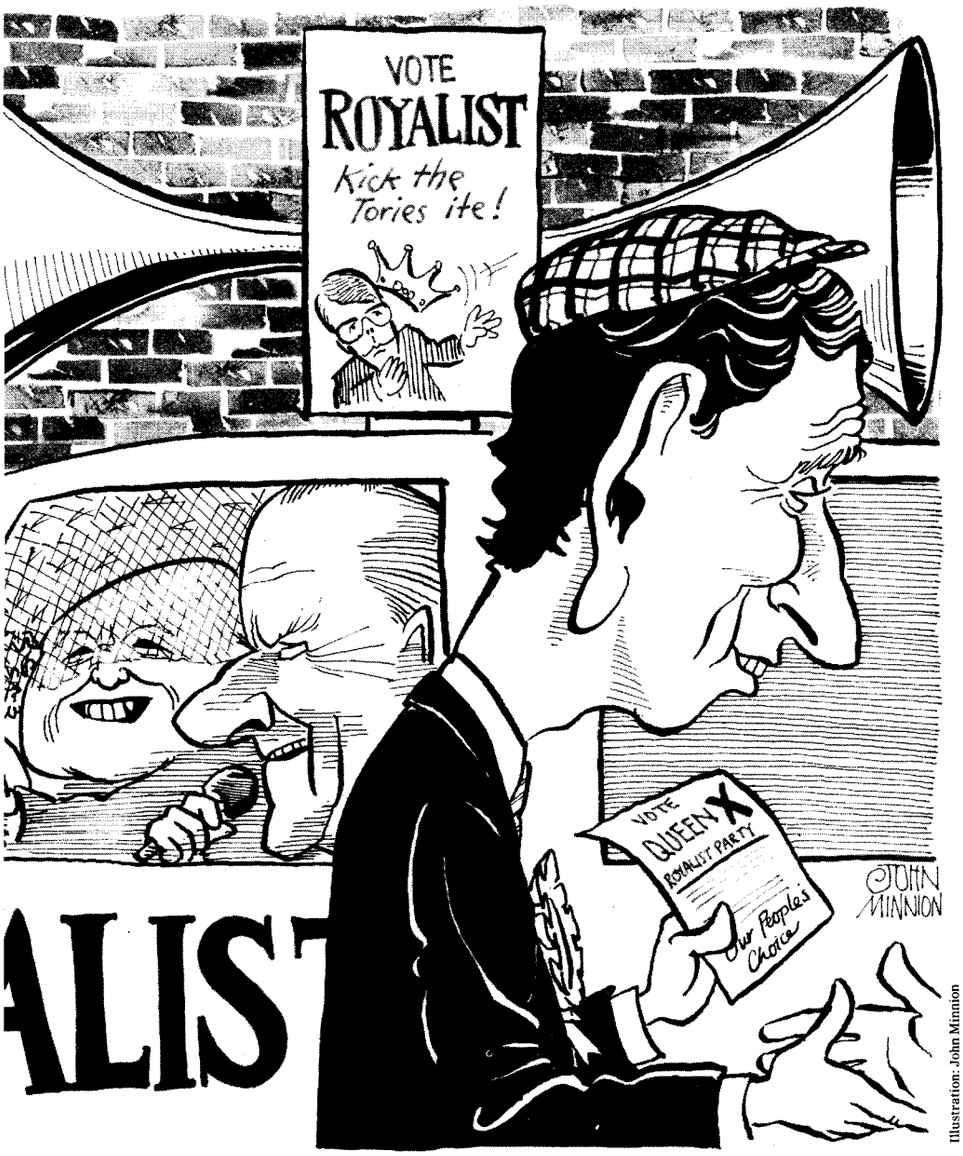

Illustration: John Minnion

We live in a waning era of separate nation-states; the royals are far more than a British phenomenon. To take Europe first: Queen Victoria was a proto-federalist, aspiring to unite Europe under the house of Saxe Coburg. Prince Charles has said he has no wish to become king of a fourth-rate nation – yet the United Kingdom is a country in crumbling decline, scarred by statist tower blocks and raddled by ossified institutions. So at this time of growing German hegemony, the Windsors should become post-Windsors, adopt Saxe Coburgism, and provide the unifying ideology Europe so badly needs – niceness.

King Charles, king of Europe, is an historic idea whose time has come. The royals have many connections with the continent. Prince Philip is Greek. Princess Michael has German links, and may help Europe to come to terms with nazism. Charles and Diana like to go on holiday (like so many) to Majorca. In winter they ski in Switzerland, tacitly acknowledging that non-EC Europe matters too.

Secondly, the Third World: while the Left remained organisationally aloof from the famine crises of the 80s, Princess Anne was in there, president of the Save the Children Fund and a channel for progressive forces. The Queen is incredibly friendly with lots of black prime ministers. And Prince Charles knows Bob Geldof, cultural icon and third greatest politician, after Thatcher and Patten, of our era.

Thirdly, they are not merely globalised, but localised. (The Duchess of *York*, Princess Michael of *Kent*). They are rooted in the regions: when Princess Anne supports the Scots at rugby she recognises that the Scots have a distinct identity, and may rightly demand autonomy. By accepting the titles Prince of Wales and Duke of Cornwall, and inheriting vast tracts of land in both places, Charles becomes implicated with, and curiously representative of, miners in the valleys and boarding house keepers in Newquay.

Most importantly, perhaps, the royals are simply the most popular and glamorous people around. They holiday with the Spanish royals, and Spain is now almost more fashionable than Italy. The most Princess Diana has ever spent on an item of clothing must be a really absolutely huge amount. The music playing on her stereo as she drove across a hot place would be something awesomely popular like Duran Duran.

The post-Windsors have discovered that politics is essentially an adjunct of public relations and showbiz – what Baudrillard called the 'ecstasy of communication'. They know they get into *Hello!* because they look good in their tiaras and fast cars, and working-class Northerners don't because their cloth caps and whippets look stupid.

Yet the Left has been too prepared to dismiss the royals' popularity as a media-fabricated plot, an establishment conspiracy, or simply an irrelevance. We should accept our enchantment with them: the Queen Mum really *does* look lovely in pastel blue. It is not just that this family is nice; they embody niceness. And this niceism carries many values and aspirations which are quite alien to the government – many of them, the ordinary assumptions people make about the world, what Gramsci called, so brilliantly, common sense. It is, for example, common sense that Margaret Thatcher should be ennobled; and the elevation of Saxe Coburgism to the federation of Europe will extend and ratify her authority as a countess.

Thanks to the Left's failure to react to new realities, the royal family was for much of the 80s the only realistic alternative to Thatcherism. The Queen became an emblematic figure of polar opposition to the spirit of selfishness and the untrammelled market. The Left is searching now for a new kind of radicalism which will meet the needs of the 90s; but it has failed to see that the revolution has already started here in Britain, under its nose, and been gathering force for the past decade. Royalism is that revolution. Chris Patten can see it of course, and Paddy Ashdown, but will the Left? Some hope.●

(Martin: Is this enough unpredictable rubbish yet to get us a name-check in a proper newspaper?)

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SELL OUT
Watch *EastEnders* instead of going to Party Meeting. Miss a turn.

TANKIE DRIVE
Historical necessity in your favour. Advance to Moscow Way.

POLL TAX DEMO

Have another go.

ZURICH (Democratic CENTRAL Intercity Hegemonic Li
Closed trains the hour, all destinatio
East.

NEW TIMES AVENUE
The end of the beginning – or just another contradiction in the system? Go back to square one.

BACK TAX
Inland Revenue demands back tax on several suitcases of used notes. Go back to Russia.

MANDELSON RISE
Plan another relaunch of *New Socialist*. Miss a turn.

BERLIN BOULEVARD (West)
Buy shares in anachronistic marxist monthly. Get your head examined.

UNIVERSITY VIEW
Attend seminar on postmodernism. Go back to Sell Out or advance to New Times Avenue.

!

SELL OUT
Give up your Party card and get a job in advertising.

MOS
GO

by Chri

A Party game of historical misjudgement to
from the history of International Socialism
recommended token woman). The game i
regard to the environment. There are few
there will be no winners. You hav

GO TO E BLOC!

ESTONIA FREEWAY
Lenin's statue is toppled. Advance to Crimea Close or have another go.

LIVERPOOL WAY
Militant attack on left-wing playwright. Join in GBH or go back to The End Of History.

WATER WORKS

The Party is over. Advance to The End Of History (you can't miss it).

?

CHOICE
Lenin's body must be re-embalmed. Sell it or incur doctor's fee.

KINNOCK CLOS
Choose the Lo
Winded Road
Socialism. Thro
a six or (ever
more unlikely
win an election
continue.

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ANIA AVENUE
rt digging a tunnel.
liss a turn.

?
CHOICE
Lenin's body is decaying.
What Is To Be Done?

VIA HAVANA
Surprise Spring Holiday.
Advance to Prague Road in convoy.

PIAZZA MANAGUA
Trying to find the *British Road To Socialism*.
Go back to the drawing board.

BUCHAREST BROADWAY
You are invited to edit the *Morning Star*.
Advance to Moscow Gold.

TOURIST

E BLOC

VISA

COW
LD

anlund

e the workers of the world. Choose a figure
your token (Rosa Luxemburg is the Party's
gely determined by the economy without
s and no guarantees. To avoid competition
thing to lose but your principles.

!
SELL OUT
Buy shares in de-nationalised grid.
Advance to higher stage of capitalism.
Have another throw.

PRAGUE ROAD
Build three hotels.
Advance to Warsaw Terrace.

BERLIN BOULEVARD (East)
The Wall falls.
Pink Floyd concert threatened.
Get out of East Berlin free.
Advance to Berlin Boulevard (West).

WARSAW TERRACE
Property is theft.
Go to jail.

?
CHOICE
Give up your Party card.
Advance to New Times Avenue.

MOSCOW WAY
Drunk in charge of *Politburo*.
Go back to Old Guard Road.

HELSINKI CENTRAL STATION
ake a trip to
Moscow Way.
f you plan to
ollect Moscow
Gold, take a
suitcase.

LENINGRAD LANE
Error of judgement in Yeltsin's favour.
Advance to New Times Avenue.

CRIMEA CLOSE
None of your phones are working.
Tune in to the World Service and miss a turn.

POLL TAX DEMAND
Go directly to E Bloc.
Do not collect Moscow Gold.

PERESTROIKA PROSPECT
Become a Designer Socialist overnight.
Advance to Mandelson Rise.

RED SQUARE
GLASNOST AND FREE TALKING

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David Edgar sounds the last post

The Final Deadline

In 1968, the *News of the World* ran a severally-parted exposé of the worldwide revolutionary conspiracy, which included a list of leading militants in various seats of learning. I was attempting to overthrow the University of Manchester at the time, and it caused us much merriment to be informed that our activities were being masterminded by a postgraduate student who had left Manchester for London a good year earlier. But what caused the most hilarity was not his absence but his identity. Who could think, we scoffed, that anybody could be agitated or subverted by *Martin Jacques*?

This attitude to Jacques and his works has of course percolated through to his more recent activities. It's one of life's little ironies that he ended up writing for a paper owned by the same company as the *News of the World*. In 1983, I was still able to raise a laugh out of people only buying CP publications for the recipes; and, more recently, when Bryan Gould was accused of covert Bolshevism by virtue of his having talked to *Marxism Today*, he had only to give a wry smile. All appear to agree with the Workers' Revolutionary Party, when it described *Marxism Today* as the most inappropriately titled periodical in the country.

Well, it was and it wasn't, and while there were aspects of the magazine's content, form and practice that arose very directly out of its ownership (of which a few examples below), there's no question that it allowed and encouraged a much greater flexibility of content (and, even more importantly, expression and tone) than its competitors.

It also took its writers seriously. This was not, I have to say, always an unmixed blessing for those of us who had prudently kept our day jobs; the editor of a magazine that does not pay its contributors must perforce be a good persuader, and the editor of this one prepares a heady cocktail of cajolement and flattery. Rare was it that the subject of an article was not the most pressing and profound to face the Movement; rare was it too that anyone else could conceivably address the subject with anything like one's own authority.

And rare was it, also, that the article one was being invited to contribute was not vitally and utterly essential *at the present historical juncture*, or, put another way, within a fortnight. Any sensible editor fudges delivery dates, and Jacques did so with a sophistication born of detailed personal experience. Even so, rumour has it that there was one regular contributor whose legendary capacity for ferreting out the real, actual, unambiguous and final deadline meant that his copy was *always* delivered to the printer at 3:00 am by bicycle; other whisperers implied that the relation of the given deadline to reality was the expression of some strange and unstated pecking order of which only the editor himself was fully aware.

Once delivered, copy was subject to rigorous but collaborative editing. For all writers, the first sight of a printed piece is a moment of high trepidation. With a number of journals, the only question is the extent and significance of the damage, a form of literary triage. But I can think of only one occasion (and that involving an illustration) in which I have had that kind of disappointment

Cartoon: Nick Newman

with *Marxism Today*. Lengthy and sometimes irksome the editorial process might have been, but there were no unpleasant surprises. What you agreed was what you ended up with.

One of the trickiest matters that came up in the revision process was that of style. Sometimes this was a simple matter of eliminating a form of sentimental left triumphalism which would be witheringly dismissed as 'right on'. Contributors were also quickly discouraged from that form of left rhetoric which doesn't so much assume that the reader agrees with what is being said, but, rather, implies that those who disagree are engaged in self-conscious heresy.

But the fact that certain sorts of rhetoric were discouraged did not imply that there was not a house style. Recently, in the decadent period at the end of its days, the tone of the frothy bits in the back and front of the magazine has been allowed to seep into the proper articles in the middle. In previous times, sterner rules prevailed. A proper *Marxism Today* article began by identifying a left shibboleth, and then proceeded to a sober (and often numerated) listing of those factors which might incline the reader to a more flexible and iconoclastic view of the matter, concluding with the statement that the Left had ignored this issue for too long (and would continue to do so only at its peril), lightened perhaps by a short list (again, most likely numerated) of pointers towards future socialist policy on the question in hand.

And while certain kinds of jargon were discouraged (the military vocabulary of 'struggle', 'conflict', 'advanced sections' and 'vanguards' was frowned on; while 'capitalism' popped up from time to time, 'bourgeoisie' and 'proletariat' were used sparingly, if at all), writers were not proscribed from noting the characteristics of and factors contributing to the present, if not current, epoch. Indeed, in a very real way, it was impossible to read an issue without being reminded that for all its iconoclasm, *Marxism Today* was part of a particular tradition of thinking and writing, that it arose out of as well as challenged Marxism Yesterday.

In a recent *Sunday Telegraph*, the conservative academic (and, lest we forget, compulsory repatriation advocate) John Casey had some merry fun with a piece by Eric Hobsbawm in which the latter explained why he believed and would continue to believe in the unselfish devotion and heroism of many people he had known in the communist movement. What Casey performed was the old trick of substituting the word 'nazi' for 'communist' (and 'Conservative' for 'Labour'), sitting back, spreading his hands and saying, 'Well, look here'.

This is not the place to rehearse the argument against nazi-communist equivalence. But one glance at *any* nazi publication followed by one glance at *any* communist one would demonstrate that leninism was a serious attempt to address the most fundamental questions of earthly life, while fascism was no more than a stew of spite, stupidity, hysteria and kitsch.

Although it had more reason to retain the faith than many, *Marxism Today* went further and faster than most in repudiating the crimes of existing socialist regimes, and in acknowledging that (and demonstrating how) those crimes were an inevitable consequence of a flawed ideology. But, unlike those sections of the Left that have rejected any grand perspective (the old vision wanting, keep your eyes shut), *Marxism Today* continued to be serious, to be historical, to be analytical, and in its way to be visionary. It wasn't the old vision, and it remains fractured and incomplete, but at its best it was what made this periodical different from the others, and dragged people from such a wide variety of origins to want to write for it and feel that it was theirs.

Ah, but I wax 'right on'. The real deadline approaches. Before the last post sounds, this must go in it.●

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The Class Of

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Marxism Today

Turn to Page 63 to find out who's who

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Crab-Like Into The Future

The strategic vision of Thatcherism has given way to the pragmatism of Major and Kinnock. **David Marquand** speculates where the UK might be in 2000...

Prophecy has always been a mug's game. At a time of rapid and disorientating change, it is even more foolhardy than usual. Ten years ago, the second cold war was at its height, Shirley Williams had just been elected for Crosby, and the SDP-Liberal Alliance was scoring around 50% in the opinion polls. Michael Foot led the Labour Party; Brezhnevite 'stagnation' reigned in the Soviet Union; and although the European Community was deep into its second enlargement, worldly-wise British commentators took it for granted that the federalist dreams of the founding fathers had been in vain. A correct prediction of what has actually happened in the last decade – in Britain, in Europe or in the world at large – would have seemed a sign of mental disorder.

By the same token, the only thing we know for certain about the year 2000 is that it will be different from 1991, in ways we cannot now foretell. Yet trend-spotting is more than a parlour game. It makes sense to try to anticipate the future, even though things are almost certain to turn out differently, if only because the alternative is to drift helplessly with the current. Though we cannot know what the world will be like at the end of the century, we can chart the course that events are taking now. Only by doing so can we take avoiding action if they are moving in the wrong direction.

There is not much doubt about the direction of the global trends which have already transformed the political economies of the industrial West and which seem, if anything, even more powerful now than they did a year or two ago.

'The only thing we know for certain about the year 2000 is that it will be different from 1991, in ways we cannot now foretell'

For most of the last 300 years, the state and civil society followed parallel trajectories. 'Modernising' states faced 'modernising' civil societies, and vice versa. Rationalisation, organisation, uniformity – the quintessential hallmarks of the state – increasingly became the hallmarks of civil society, at any rate in what were held to be its 'advanced' sectors. Small firms, craft guilds, self-employed workers still survived, of course, but they were seen as sociological detritus which history would soon clear away.

The process reached its apogee in the postwar Keynesian welfare states of the West and stalinist-leninist states of the East, with their rational bureaucracies, modernising agendas and teleological governing philosophies. Now it has come to an end. For good or ill (and,

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Illustration: Michael Sheehy

as always, good and ill have gone together), civil society has started to follow a baffling new trajectory, culturally, technologically and in the economy, in which differentiation, diversification and disorganisation are combined with a strange kind of transnationalisation. But the logic of the state is still the old 'modernising' logic; and it finds it painfully hard to accommodate itself to the change.

The results have varied from place to place. In the former communist bloc, the cultural and economic transformation of the last 25 years provoked a kind of implosion of the stalinist-leninist state. Despite crises of varying intensity in some countries, however, the liberal-democratic state is not dead, or even dying. Its fate has been more complex. Its boundaries – conceptual and geographical – are losing meaning. Policy areas where its writ used to run have slipped out of its control. New problems have emerged, which it can solve only in concert with other institutions, at least partially independent of it. Other loyalties and identities have started to pull against the loyalties on which it used to call and the identities it used to subsume. And because of all this, as Ghita Ionescu brilliantly shows in an important new book[1], the traditional notion of sovereignty, which has been fundamental to it since its first appearance on the stage of European politics in the early-modern period, no longer has much purchase on reality.

More and more, the true map of governance in the modern world resembles the patchwork quilt of medieval Europe, which the emerging nation-state destroyed, rather than those of the 19th or early 20th centuries. The state survives; but except in the formal, legal sense it is no longer the supreme authority within a defined territory. It has to bargain with multinational companies strong enough to play one state off against another and anticipate or react to the opinion swings of foreign exchange dealers whose operations no state can control. Partly because economic development can now be fostered more effectively at lower levels of government, and partly because the cultural shift of the last 25 years has encouraged a rebirth of local and regional identities, it increasingly shares its power with state or provincial authorities closer to the people. In its European birthplace, it also shares power with the now proto-federal institutions of the European Community. It has ceased to be the sole custodian of the interests of its people. It is part of a complex grid of overlapping and interpenetrating institutions with competences that cut across its own.

The liberal-democratic states of the industrial West have encountered these upheavals in different ways. All states have drawn in their horns to some degree. 'Heroic', top-down national planning has been abandoned almost everywhere. Most states have become more parsimonious in their approach to social welfare. Beyond such broad generalities, however, what strikes the observer most is the specificity of each national experience. The course followed by any particular state has depended on its own structures and traditions; on the technological, economic and cultural inheritance of its civil society; and, not least, on the accidents of personality and contingencies of fate.

'More and more, the true map of governance in the modern world resembles the patchwork quilt of medieval Europe'

By any reckoning, the course followed by the British state has been one of the least happy in the industrial West. The worldwide upheavals of the 1970s hit an already-debilitated British economy particularly hard. Successive governments failed to mobilise consent for their attempts to cope with the consequences, sometimes abjectly. Yet in spite of a radical change of direction at the end of the decade, the problems which baffled the government of the 1960s and 1970s are still in evidence in the early 1990s. The British economy is no more competitive now than it was in 1981. The symbiosis between public and private power, which is one of the hallmarks of the most successful economies in the modern world, is as elusive as ever. Meanwhile, Britain has found it more difficult than almost any other member-state of the European Community to reconstruct its territorial constitution to meet the need for greater local autonomy, on the one hand, or to come to terms with the Community's transition from loose-knit confederation to quasi-federation, on the other.

The central question for the future of British politics is whether the British state will adapt more successfully in the next decade than it has done in the last two. The obstacles are formidable; if they were not, they would have been overcome already. They have to do, not just with the vested interests of the political parties, important though those are, but with the genetic code of the state itself – with its reliance on

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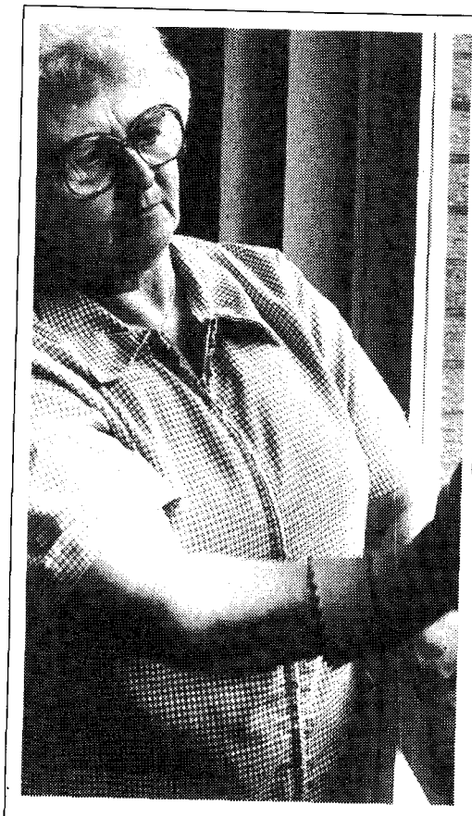

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inherited authority, immemorial custom, tacit understandings; with its tradition of passive, as opposed to participatory, citizenship; with the related tradition of strong and autonomous executive power which was so widely celebrated in the postwar period. Most of all, they have to do with the nexus of values and presuppositions implied by the notion of an indefeasible and absolutely sovereign crown-in-parliament, the sources of whose authority are impenetrable to mere human reason.

These values and presuppositions are plainly out of joint with a sensibility that increasingly extols variety, autonomy, authenticity and self-fulfilment. Less obviously, but just as importantly, they run against the grain of productive processes to which self-reliance, flexibility and high levels of human capital are fundamental. Last, but by no means least, they are at odds with the two great themes of contemporary European political economy, upward transfers of competence to the Community and downward transfers to the region or province. To ask if the British state can adapt more successfully in the 1990s than it did in the 1970s or 1980s is, in short, to ask it if it can experience a sort of voluntary mutation, to which history offers singularly few parallels.

There is, of course, no way of telling. What is clear is that the Thatcherite attempt to avoid the problem has failed. In essence, the Thatcherites tried to do two things. In the sphere of private consumption, the way was to be cleared for civil society's new trajectory. Britain was to be locked ever more tightly into the interdependent world economy, with its global markets, global swings of fashion and global companies. In shopping malls, house agents' brochures, mail-order catalogues and foreign exchange houses, variety, autonomy and self-fulfilment were to be given their heads. If borrowers wished to mortgage their futures for the sake of present consumption, or if asset strippers wished to sacrifice the long-term interest of the economy to short-term profit, nobody was to say them nay.

But in every other sphere (including the sphere of production), civil society was to be forced back into the traditional mould of the state. Hierarchy, authority and patriarchy were to be restored to their rightful place – in government, in firms, in schools, in nationalised industries, in local authorities, even, if possible, in families. And just as there was to be no nonsense about power-sharing in industry or in the management of the economy, so there was to be no nonsense about pooling sovereignty in the European Community or about devolving power from the south-eastern core of the British state to the nations and regions north and west of the Severn-Trent line.

Thatcher's fall brought that project to an end. In certain critical spheres, at any rate, it turned out that the British state was simply too weak to do what the Thatcherite project required it to do. It could not defy the logic of European integration, any more than the French state had been able to defy it in 1981. If Britain were to remain in the Community at all – and not even the most fervent Thatcherites ever contemplated life outside it – it could not draw a ring fence around monetary union once its partners had recognised this to be an inevitable corollary of a genuinely single market. Much the same was true, though in a far more complicated fashion, of central-local relations. Here, the central state had the legal authority to do what it wished. But when it tried to complete the subordination of local government by applying a consumerist model to the financing of local services, the political price turned out to be too high for Conservative backbenchers' pockets.

The end of Thatcherism has, however, left a vacuum which nobody has yet rushed in to fill. Majorism is not a project in the sense that Thatcherism was a project. It is a sort of ragôut of old-style Tory paternalism and new-style Thatcherite entrepreneurialism, laced with upward social mobility and the palpable personal decency of its author. It may suffice to win the Conservatives the next election, though that looks less likely than it did a year ago. There is no evidence that it offers any solution whatever – good, bad or indifferent – to the long-drawn-out crisis of maladaptation which grips the British state. And Kinnockism is simply the mirror image of Majorism - equally decent, equally a mishmash of old and new, equally lacking in solutions to the problems that really matter.

This makes prediction even more hazardous than usual. I cannot believe that things will go on indefinitely as they are now. And since the Thatcherite solution has failed once, it is hard to believe that any other solution from that stable could succeed. The obvious implication is that, instead of trying to tailor civil society to the state, British governments will sooner or later start to tailor the state to civil society. In this country, it is true, 'sooner or later' has a nasty habit of meaning 'quite a lot later'; and, unless the crisis of maladaptation turns ugly – which it may – I have a hunch that this is what it will mean on this occasion. But although it is hard to imagine a clap of thunder suddenly bringing the most narcissistic and inward-looking political class in western Europe to its senses, the steady drip, drip, drip of events will surely tell its own story.

The European chapter in that story is the easiest to read. Whatever happens in the wider Europe which now stretches, on some definitions, to Poland's eastern border, the little Europe of Brussels, Luxembourg and Strasbourg is virtually certain to move further and faster along the road to federation. It may or may not use that word, but the thing has become almost inescapable. In the six member states which founded the community in the first place, and which still form its heartland, we can look forward to a single currency, a single central bank, a uniform monetary policy and harmonised budgetary policies by the end of the century. Political union is a different matter, but there too the pressure to move toward a kind of quasi-federation, at the lowest level, is almost irresistible.

'Kinnockism is simply the mirror image of Majorism - equally decent, equally a mishmash of old and new, equally lacking in solutions to the problems that really matter'

It is more difficult to guess what will happen outside the heartland, but the odds are that some, at least, of the recent entrants and even some of those now seeking entry will participate in this quasi-federation as fully as the Six. In a Community divided between a rapidly integrating core and a slow-moving periphery, the core can be expected to include Spain, Ireland, perhaps Denmark and conceivably Austria as well as France, Germany, Italy and the Benelux countries. If it did, it would stretch from Limerick to Vienna and from Berlin to Cadiz. Britain could, of course, opt for the periphery, as it did in the 1950s. But exclusion from the decision-making processes of the core – albeit self-imposed – would be even more painful in the 1990s than it was 40 years ago. Though there can be no certainty, the overwhelming probability is that the logic which took Britain into the Community in the first place will also take it into its next, proto-federalist, phase – more slowly than the heartland countries, no doubt, but more quickly than either front bench can conceive at the moment.

The second chapter has to do with the even more sensitive questions of territoriality, identity and nationhood. In the non-English nations of the United Kingdom, the last few years have seen a vigorous, sometimes passionate (and, in the case of Northern Ireland, bloody) debate about the meaning of nationality and its relationship with the British state. In that debate, the English have mostly been silent, but in spite of their silence, there is no longer any doubt that 'Britain' is a multi-national state, or that the relationship between that state and its constituent nations is in contention, as it has not been since the crisis over Irish home rule. And, as the furore over the poll tax showed, the territorial constitution of the dominant English nation is equally in flux. Of all these sources of instability, however, only the Scottish question has the potential to provoke a crisis of state.

The long agony of Northern Ireland can be contained; the English periphery lacks sufficient sense of identity to mount a serious challenge to the hegemony of the centre; language divides the Welsh against themselves. But, as the Scottish constitutional convention has shown, the Scots are on the march. They have lost their role as junior partners in the directorate of the British empire – the prize for which they signed the Act of Union in the first place – and, logically enough, they now wish to renegotiate it. Since they cannot be

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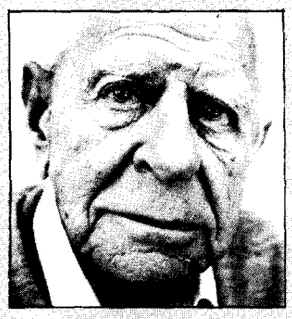
Grave New World

What is the greatest challenge facing the world after the collapse of communism? Some of the world's leading thinkers give their answers.



You ask: 'What is the greatest challenge facing the world after the collapse of communism?' Apart from the fact that Chinese communism may still prove highly destructive before its collapse, there are quite a few challenges remaining from the collapse of the Soviet Union. It is not sufficiently known that, according to Sakharov's *Memoirs*, his 'Big Bomb', tested in 1961, was 'several thousand times more powerful than the bomb dropped on Hiroshima'. Sakharov does not exaggerate.

There were at least 50 of these bombs produced during the first year (1961-2). 38 were displayed in Cuba, (even though 'we hadn't had time to deliver all our shipments to Cuba', as Khruschev writes); assuming Sakharov's 'several' to be *at least* equal to three, there were at least the equivalent of 114,000 Hiroshima bombs in Cuba – fortunately not yet quite ready for firing. ('The liquidation of the capitalist system is the crucial question in the development of society' – *Khruschev Remembers*.) Since then, with a yearly production of *at least* 50 Sakharov bombs, about 1,400 will have been produced. Of those, 1,100 have been admitted to exist, equivalent to at least 3.3m Hiroshima bombs. They constitute the most urgent 'challenge'.

Karl Popper

It is quite likely that our little island will have some trouble surviving. And by our little island I don't mean England, I mean the island of the rich. So it seems to me that the victory over communism is a Pyrrhic victory, a phoney victory.

The disintegration and the increasing misery all over the world will not just simply stop at our borders. We have the first indications now, in the shape of immigration, break-up, civil war, strife, boat people – this is just a portent ▶

kept in the existing union against their wishes, a renegotiation of some sort is inevitable. The question is: what sort? Two possibilities stand out. One (it might be called the Thames Valley option) would be to concede Scottish home rule, at the price of drastically reduced Scottish representation at Westminster. The Scots would get what they want, and the hegemony of the south-east over Wales and the English periphery would be reinforced. The other – the federalist, or perhaps crypto-federalist, option – would be to combine Scottish home rule with varying degrees of autonomy for Wales and those English regions which wished to have it. It would be the most damaging blow to the hegemony of the south-east since the end of the Danelaw.

'Instead of trying to tailor civil society to the state, British governments will sooner or later start to tailor the state to civil society'

At this point, a third, more sordid, chapter comes into the discussion. This has to do with the party system, and more particularly with the relationship between the future of the parties and the future of the state. On the European question, there is no longer much to choose between the government and the opposition. For the moment, Labour is slightly more enthusiastic about further integration than are the Conservatives, but that is because it is out of office. In government, Labour ministers would be as reluctant as Conservative ones to give up the delights of Westminster absolutism in the short term – and as subject, over the long term, to the magnetic pull of the European heartland.

The territorial constitution is a different matter. The Thames Valley option would destroy any hope of a majority Labour government at Westminster. The crypto-federalist option, on the other hand, would make power at Westminster less of a prize in any event; and it would also create powerful state or regional governments in the areas where Labour's strength is concentrated. In short, the Conservatives, the historic party of the union, have most to gain from ending it. Labour, for most of its history a bastion of Fabian centralism, has most to gain from the old Liberal policy of home rule all round. The Liberal Democrats add a further irony to the tale. They are the only United Kingdom party to recognise the contradiction between state and civil society, and to propose a new constitutional settlement to resolve it. A key element in their programme is a fundamental reconstruction of the territorial constitution on crypto-federalist lines. In a central aspect of the central issue of the time, in other words, they and the Labour Party are on the same side. But they also look forward to a realignment of the Left and believe – rightly or wrongly – that one of its preconditions is another Labour defeat. So they are torn, their constitutional project pulling them in one direction, and their political project in another.

Three broad scenarios emerge from all this speculation. The first – it might be called the Japanese scenario – is one of continuing Conservative rule. The decencies of John Major, combined with the social-market rhetoric of Christopher Patten, win the next election for their party; and having won in 1992, the inertia of custom carries them to victory in 1996 or 1997 as well. After an initial spasm of pain, Britain begins a slow, crab-like progress towards European federalism; the territorial question is answered in Thames Valley fashion; though nobody openly repudiates the Thatcher legacy, its acerbities are softened; and though the contradiction between state and civil society is not resolved, it gradually becomes less acute – not because the state suddenly changes course, but because it gradually becomes more humble and more humdrum.

The second scenario is that of reborn Labourism. Kinnock pulls it off in 1992; a combination of the disciplines of the Exchange Rate Mechanism and the dour rectitude of John Smith ensures that, for the first time in its history, Labour does not blow its chance through fiscal imprudence at the beginning of its term of office; and Liberal Democrat hopes of a realignment fade away. As in the first scenario, but with a smaller spasm of pain, Britain edges closer to the rapidly federalising European heartland. Pressure from the Scots ensures that the government honours its commitment to a crypto-federalist constitution. Once again, the trajectories of state and civil society move closer together – in a slightly more stirring way than in the first scenario, perhaps, but only slightly.

The third scenario is that of the long-awaited, long-postponed realignment. It comes about in one of several possible ways: perhaps through a fourth Labour defeat; perhaps through a hung parliament; perhaps because a majority Labour government splits under the pressure of adverse circumstances. But the mechanism scarcely matters. The important point is that the scattered heirs of the pre-1914 Liberal coalition come together again, around a programme of constitutional reform explicitly designed to address the crisis of maladaptation which has been neglected for so long. For the growing reform constituency mobilised by Charter 88 and revealed by last summer's Mori poll on the state of the nation, this is, of course, by far the best option. Not the least of the ironies in the current state of British politics, however, is that even the inferior scenarios I discussed a moment ago lead, in the end, to a similar destination. The choice for the British state is between a slow, furtive sidle into the 21st century and a confident canter. One way or the other, it will get there in the end.●

1. Ghita Ionescu, *Leadership In An Interdependent World, The Statesmanship Of Adenauer, De Gaulle, Thatcher, Reagan And Gorbachev*, Longman, 1991

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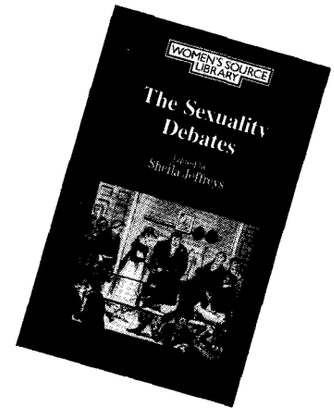

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Oh! To Be In Europe

If we want to understand Britain's future, then we must understand what is going to happen to Europe. **Neal Ascherson** navigates us through the European waters of the 90s and beyond

All discussions about Europe take place in the shadow of a joke. We talk about this place, but we cannot say precisely where it is. This was as true of debates about Europe in 1914 as it is now, in 1991. To be European is to be condemned to an uncertainty of definition, for, though we can affirm that the place ends in the west at the Atlantic, there is no economic or cultural frontier to the east. If Bialystok is European, why not Grodno a few miles to the east beyond the present Soviet-Polish frontier? If Grodno, why not Moscow, and if Moscow why not Irkutsk and then Vladivostok and then – should a strait of sea make such a difference – Vancouver?

Amazing, then, that people in this country still use de Gaulle's formula about a Europe ending at the Urals. Equally amazing that they speak and write easily about the 'reunification' of Europe after the collapse of the Soviet external empire two years ago. This Europe was never united except for brief moments under Hitler or Napoleon, and to talk of 'reunification' is to overlook the novelty of our transient chance of overcoming its divisions. They are divisions of language, of religion, of geography and political experience, but the important contrast in recent history has been economic – the old matter of uneven development.

Since the industrial revolution on the European mainland, much of it state-driven in the 19th century, there have been two Europes: one rich, one poor. Their relationship has been in many ways colonial: the wealthy and industrialised west exploiting the east's reserves of cheap workers, food and raw materials. The collapse of the European land

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empires after 1917-18 only made this colonialism and exploitation more stark; most industry in the newly-independent post-Versailles states was foreign-owned, while the worst impact of the depression fell upon the east European peasantries. If the most obviously 'colonial' power before 1914 was imperial Germany, with its ideology towards the 'second Europe' formulated by the Mitteleuropa theorists, the period between the wars saw economic hegemony more widely distributed between German, French, American and to a limited extent British and Italian capital.

The question now, two years after the 1989 revolutions, is whether this colonial division is to be revived. Marxist socialism, for east and central European intellectuals between the wars, was perceived as an answer to this problem. The Soviet model of communism seemed to offer an ideology of autarchic development which would industrialise those societies behind a defence wall against foreign capitalism, and which – through a combination of agrarian collectivisation and the location of new factories in distressed areas – would drain rural over-population off the land.

The failure of that communist experiment is seen in political terms, and also in terms of an overwhelming economic failure to create living standards comparable with those of the capitalist world. Yet the question which the first communist generation sought to answer survives, and reasserts itself. If no new answer can be found, then it is clear what will happen. The iron curtain will be redrawn along the Oder-Neisse border between Poland and united Germany, a river border which is already threatening to mark the divide between two worlds as surely as the Rio Grande between Mexico and the United States. Further south, it may run between a westernised Bohemia and an independent Slovak state, and then between Austria and Hungary.

On one side of the divide will be the Community and its auxiliaries. On the other will be nations whose industrial economy has been almost totally destroyed by doctrinaire exposure to market forces, and reduced to complete dependence on western sources of finance and investors in a buyers' market. If that does become the economic position, then the political outlook for Poland or Hungary, let alone Romania or Bulgaria, would be little more than the management of misery. It would, in all probability, bring plural democratic politics to an early and ignominious conclusion, and replace them with various forms of populist dictatorship. Authoritarian nationalist regimes would offer their subjects scapegoats in the form of indigenous minorities or neighbouring countries.

That is the blackest outlook. But it does not have to happen, and there are some signs that it may not happen – at least, not everywhere east of the Oder. It looks as if the honeymoon with the free market economy – celebrated with Thatcherism distilled to an intensity which was never uncorked in the country of its origin – may be ending.

This change is more obvious to other west Europeans than to the British. The other day, the middle-of-the-road Hamburg weekly *Die Zeit* held a colloquy on eastern Europe, and Countess Doenhoff – the ascetic old Prussian baroness who used to edit the paper – opened the session with a few words which she assumed would be common ground for everyone there. 'Today we can see that nothing can be done without government action to lay down a framework, and that political reasons alone demand that everything should not be left to the operations of the free market. Not least because the preconditions for it are missing in the ex-communist countries: no working capital market, no adaptable banking system, no tax system oriented to a market economy and no sense of how the market works. The state is needed: it must lay down the outlines and define the new structures which are required and give the push for impetus. The transition to a market economy temporarily requires precisely what it intends to abolish in the long term: state planning.'

This is the voice – unselfconscious, confident – of the modern German consensus. It represents a confidence that the 'mixed economy' (almost always mentioned in the English words) has not only stood the test of the 40-year life of West Germany, but is proving the only reliable anchor while the economic tempests roused by the integration of the old East Germany are still raging. The state must plan and guide, while the private sector is encouraged – often by state intervention – to develop according to that guidance. Whether we call that approach 'right-wing social democrat' or 'left-wing Christian democrat' does not greatly matter. Both are on the opposite side of the chasm which divides the main German political parties from Thatcherite conservatism – and from the laissez-faire approach which has been dominating many east European finance ministries.

That approach is now beginning to decline. There are several possible reasons for the change. One is political. The Polish elections in late October showed plainly and ominously that public willingness to undergo acute hardship (job losses, huge price increases, collapses of real income) had run out after two years in which the state had stood back and let the market rip. There was a turnout of only 43%; the centre-left Solidarity forces which had overthrown communism and formed the governments lost heavily; the extremes of Right and Left gained sharply. No constellation is worse than the growth of apathy in the middle and unrestrained extremism in fanatical minorities (a profile, too, of what is happening in Russia). Most political leaders in post-communist Europe can see the implicit threat to democracy.

The second reason is that, broadly speaking, these countries have only now begun to reform the industrial sector. There is a case – there certainly was in Poland – for tackling problems of consumer-market supply and demand, of retailing and distribution and especially of currency and exchange rates with the utmost radicalism. Government simply unplugged everything, went home and returned in the morning to see what had happened. The result was a raw, brutal economy which showed a terrifying vigour in many sectors. It increased inequality and penalised the weakest in society, and (worst) damaged private agriculture badly – the public could no longer afford food prices which gave the farmer any incentive to produce. But it was alive: ugly as it might be, it had stood up on its own feet without assistance. Industry, however, is different.

Everyone knew that the state's withdrawal from the old 'socialised industrial sector' would create job losses and bankruptcies. But it can also cause catastrophic waste, when free-market fanatics in the ministries refuse to help restructure industries which, with some government loans at low rates or even some government outline plan for the future of industrial branches, would stand an excellent chance of surviving and competing. Much healthy capacity and many jobs have already been lost unnecessarily. But the message is now being read. In Poland, the government announced just before the elections that privatisation would be slowed sharply down, and that the state would now involve itself directly in the 'restructuring' of industry. The Czechoslovak government, well behind in the process of transformation, is watching the Polish experience closely.

'The honeymoon with the free market economy – celebrated with Thatcherism distilled to an intensity which was never uncorked in the country of its origin – may be ending'

All this is intensely significant for the relationship between the 'two Europes'. The point can be made dogmatically. If post-communist Europe now opts for the 'mixed economy', with social-democratic values at least to some extent restored, then there is a chance that those countries will not relapse into their traditional quasi-colonial relationship with the west. If on the other hand they persist for much longer with fanatical non-interventionist policies, going for old-fashioned 'stability' rather than the protection of living standards, then nothing can save them. Their new democratic political fabrics will be blown away, their economies will be stripped and looted down to a level of primary production or of branch factories of foreign capital, and they will be ostracised as a plague-hulk moored uncomfortably close to the Spanish bullion fleet.

The role of the state, the sense of the public interest, is the key to the way in which modern European capitalism works. In a forceful article in *The Guardian* recently, Will Hutton pointed out the differences between the post-1945

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◀ of something to come.

Also the Gulf war – you could see that, perhaps, as the first sign of these outsiders beginning to beleaguer us in some sense. Of course, it is not as if the rich countries, by being rich, are somehow more devoid of morality than the rest of the world. Misery doesn't make for civic virtue. A lot of this will take fundamentalist shape, and I think these fights to come will do away with some delusions about the Third World, and the virtues of the 'noble savage' – they're not going to be noble at all.

That is the main issue before us, the first challenge politically, and nobody really knows how to deal with it. Well-meaning people say 'let's share'; but that is easier said than done, and it's not what politics has ever been about. I think Marx was right – no ruling class will simply go away, due to a sudden illumination of its moral quality.

Hans Magnus Enzensberger

I reply with a certain reluctance. The answer is necessarily very personal, very difficult. There are many problems. To choose the one that is most evident to me every day, I would say the problem of poverty. This is because the problem is immense and nobody seems to have a solution.

It is a problem that is destined to become ever more serious as populations increase – populations suffer, they emigrate, they desperately seek a solution, but they will not find one, they will not succeed. They will not find an answer in emigration; there seems to be no solution.

This is the main challenge for the immediate future, one that must be faced by the Left, by Christians, by everybody. As the world becomes increasingly interdependent, it is the problem for anybody with a sense of morality, it is the problem of all problems.

Communism has now collapsed. It gave these people some hope, but with its collapse this hope has been extinguished. What can the democratic capitalist world do? It just seeks to diminish the gravity of the problem.

Noberto Bobbio ▶

'No constellation is worse than the growth of apathy in the middle and unrestrained extremism in fanatical minorities'

economic recovery of western Europe – constantly cited as a supreme advertisement for the market economy – and the conditions which post-communist Europe now faces. The advertisement was in fact for Keynesianism. Postwar Germany had lost far less of its capital stock then modern eastern Europe is losing now; the Marshall Aid funds were colossal compared to the finance which western governments and banks are offering today; the time-scale and the increase in consumer prices were 'extraordinarily gradual'; the state intervened everywhere to protect social standards, on Erhard's principle that 'a night-watchman government' was a 'perverted form of liberty (which) would contain the seeds of disaster'.

What was being founded after 1945 was the social market economy in its original German sense, a mixed-economy pattern which continental political systems proved able to work far more effectively than the archaic British state. It is that sort of Europe which the east will now, I think, attempt to resemble after its experiment with the deeply un-European ideology which we know as Thatcherism but which was, in reality, a luxury import from west-coast America. It is late to make that change, but not too late.

All this relates to the European Community's own debate (which, after much waste of time, is now ending) about 'widening' or 'deepening'. It was founded on the either-or assumption that a Community which pushed rapidly ahead towards its own monetary and political union would do so at the cost of shelving the applications of new candidates for membership. Some, like the British Conservatives, went as far as to say that 'nationalist countries' like Poland and Hungary would reject 'deepening', refusing to pool their newly-regained sovereignty in a political union. None of this was true. What is more serious is the Community's mental sloth – its difficulties in recognising the changes in its own nature which are coming about. These difficulties are expressed in the EC's attitude to new membership.

Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary have negotiated their terms of association with the Community in the last few months (and stingy terms they are, especially in agriculture). Ahead lies a long drag of step-by-step harmonisation and adjustment until economic membership is complete. Only then, some time in the early years of the next millennium, will full political membership be granted. The trouble is that this order of proceedings no longer corresponds to reality. The Community is every year less exclusively an economic association and more importantly a political one. Moreover, while the economic problems of Europe are important and require attention, the political problems have become suddenly and infinitely more urgent since the revolutions of 1989 and the Moscow putsch of 1991, and a failure to treat them in time could lead to catastrophe. They include the danger of war. One of the results of 1989 was to create a huge vacuum in Europe uncovered by any defensive alliance or physically effective security system (it is not a condemnation of the Helsinki CSCE network that it does not yet possess any teeth). At the same time, a rapid and inevitable resurgence of nationalism revived a number of border and minority quarrels which had lain deep-frozen in the stalinist icebox for half a century.

This danger requires that the post-communist states be brought rapidly into political association with the Community. It is not just that they require protection from one another. They require protection from themselves. If Slobodnian foreign policy has become a matter for integrated Community external policy, it becomes that much more difficult for Slobodnia to start delivering ultimata to neighbouring Freedonia. If the Soviet population were really to start trekking by the million westwards (not a likely prospect), then the Community does not want to have to wait until they are wading across the Oder before it can take co-ordinated collective action – in Poland and Lithuania.

There has been some thought in Brussels about this. The best solution would be to devise an entirely new approach to EC membership, reversing the present order of events. Political membership would come first, conferred fairly rapidly, while economic membership could follow on at its own erratic pace. This would create some anomalies. Hungary, for instance, might be a member of the Council of Ministers required not to vote on the final form of a common currency because Hungary was not yet sufficiently integrated at the economic level to adopt it. Czechoslovakia (if it still existed) would have its full complement of deputies in the European parliament, but although they could vote on matters of policy towards the Middle East, they would abstain on votes about the Common Agricultural Policy (because Slovak farming was not yet sufficiently harmonised).

It would be a rather complicated, Habsburgian structure. In practice, it is unlikely that any change so radical would be attempted. And yet that vision of complexity and unwieldiness corresponds to what the Community will probably be like after a few years – when the next stage of advance towards union is well underway. I see this Europe as essentially spongy. It will be very large and very wealthy, although that wealth will be unevenly distributed in its internal cells.

Its texture will be irregular and cellular: the old nation-states will have lost power and definition both to the centre, at Brussels and Strasbourg, and also inwards to the multiplicity of sub-nations and regions which will come to form the basic components of

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the Great Sponge.

It will be soft and indecisive. Those who are worried about 'superstates' misunderstand the nature of the creature. In the past, superstates were hard-shelled imperia put together and held together by force; they thought and moved rapidly, accompanied by all the clanking and flashing of military power. But that image is now entirely out of date. The united European Community will never be like that. It will, in fact, remain in character much as it is now: it will have great difficulty in reaching quick decisions on its own (as opposed to approving of other people's decisions). It will be incapable of joint guile and bluff (as opposed to the daily guile and bluff of its component polyps). It will be selfish, short-sighted, slow-moving but lacking real malice. In spite of many training efforts which will certainly be made, the Community will never be any good at using force. Instead, like a fat fish relying on sharp-fanged parasites for protection, it will probably pay others – possibly some of its sharp-fanged members, like Britain and France – to use force on its behalf.

It will have chronic indigestion: the sort of grumbling, shooting pains which make it difficult to give full attention to anything else. The development of a Europe *des régions*, the conflicts between minorities and majorities, the constant changing of district sizes and relationships at the level of local government, will never leave the European Community in peace.

This is nothing like *Festung Europa*, the fortress-continent of which the Nazis dreamed. It is true that the Community's intention, understood if not always explicit, is to keep the world's poor outwith its walls. In that, the European union will resemble the other two *enceintes* of fortified privilege which are being constructed to keep out some of the consequences of the New World Disorder: in north America and the Pacific rim. But the fortress will not succeed in being impermeable. Nobody will storm this walled city-continent, as the crusaders and the Ottomans stormed Constantinople. Instead, the outside world will enter as a steady leak into the Community's sponginess, much as it has been leaking into the richer states of north-western Europe for the past quarter-century. It will not be – has not been – a matter of an inrush of illegal immigrants. It will be legal and semi-legal: the visitors who overstay, the applicants for residence whose papers take years to be processed, the contract workers whose contracts never quite run out.

Immigration will eventually undermine this Community – let us call it the Europe of Kohl and Delors, as opposed to the Europe of Monnet and Schuman. But it will undermine it for the better. At present, the Community exists for the benefit of its own 'natives', and in particular to offer more prosperity and security to those natives who already have some. (The Social Charter, for all its modest virtues, is a skilled workers' charter.) But the time will come when the change in the balance of population will tip the political balance as well: when the *pays légal* of the EC's formal citizens will be decisively outnumbered by the informal population: the poorest and most peripheral natives, plus the settled immigrants.

'The united European Community will be selfish, slow-moving but lacking real malice. It will never be any good at using force'

Their political alliance will achieve two things. It will accelerate the steady draining of ethnic identity from Europe's countless nationalisms. (This is happening already. I have only to think of a small town I know in Provence where the Italian immigrant mayor and his Spanish assistant have just made the study of Provencal compulsory in primary schools.) And it will change the Community's ideology, pushing it irresistibly towards more popular, compassionate and interventionist practices – towards Monnet once more, and away from Kohl/Delors.

The old nation-states were quite skilful at the game of evading and delaying the enfranchisement of new populations whose influence they feared. But the Great Sponge, as it swells up to its full size and unity, will be far less adept at resisting change. And that is its real virtue.●

Neal Ascherson is a columnist for the Independent On Sunday

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and parties of capital, have been the two overarching ideologies of liberalism and socialism. The relationship of these two ideologies has been the foundation for much of the structure of European politics. Jointly, they created a well-defined political world.

Liberalism and socialism have been great competitors. Liberalism believes in the sanctity of individual rational choice, the centrality of markets, strict limits to the role of the state, and private property. Equal political rights combine with the freedom to take part in market exchanges to create a society which works to everyone's advantage without anyone planning it. Socialism believes in the importance of collective identities and action, economic alternatives to the market such as planning, an expansive role for the state and publicly-owned property. Socialists have always doubted whether equal political rights can amount to very much unless they are backed by economic equality. Society can only work to everyone's advantage when it is consciously planned.

For decades liberalism and socialism have slugged it out. But through this competition they also collaborated in shaping our political world. They come from common roots. They were both spawned by the economic dynamism and the exploitation of 19th-century industrialisation. Since then they have been like running partners, each alternately setting the pace for the other.

Socialism constantly pulled liberalism to extend its interest in equal rights from the political into the economic domain. Liberalism was constantly critical of the coercive power of the socialist state, the frailty of socialism's democratic foundations. Modern-day liberal democracy is so much the product of liberalism's long contest with socialism that it must be severely disrupted by the mounting fatigue of its normal pace-maker.

Liberalism and socialism together staked out the political terrain. They jointly defined the agenda and priorities of politics as being about markets versus planning, public ownership and private property, the limits of the state and the role of parliamentary democracy. More than that, liberalism and socialism share important beliefs about politics. They both believe politics is inspired by universal ideals, that its main aim is to create a framework to promote economic growth, and that societies progress through history because they are guided by the unfolding thread of human reason. Liberalism and socialism have competed ferociously, but they have also tacitly colluded to create an ideological duopoly.

The Europe created by this ideological duopoly is losing its neatness and order. The most obvious reason is the crumbling of the left-hand side of the duopoly: the collapse of communism, the weakening of organised labour and the widespread ideological fatigue of socialist and social democratic parties. A see-saw which one person gets up from no longer functions as a see-saw for the person left sitting upon it.

A less obvious factor is the way that the position of the victors is also changing. In their moment of triumph, the western European liberal democracies face a relentless and mounting challenge from the very different models of economic modernisation being produced by the Far East. In addition, events in eastern Europe are turning into a very mixed blessing. It is not at all clear that eastern Europe will endorse the liberal democratic model by following its lead. Moreover developments in the east are forcing changes upon the formerly stable character of politics in the west. The new political terrain will not be as fertile for liberal democracy as was first thought, for three main reasons.

First, liberal democracy has succeeded in Europe because it offered the best political framework to unleash economic growth, through entrepreneurship, individualism, the incentive of the profit motive. This claim to be the political bearer of innovation and economic dynamism was central to its superiority over communism.

It is beyond doubt that the western European liberal democracies have been more economically successful than the communist states. What is in doubt is whether European liberal democracy is more efficient than other, more recently-developed models of the market economy. It is no longer obvious that it is either necessary or advantageous for a society seeking economic growth and industralisation to follow a west European liberal democratic model. Just because liberal democracy was the political system which accompanied the economic surge of industrialisation in 19th-century Europe does not mean it is necessarily the best political midwife for growth in the 21st century.

It is becoming increasingly clear that the merits of the market can be combined with a variety of cultures and political systems. The really impressive models of economic growth over the past two decades, in which eastern European states are becoming increasingly interested, come not from western Europe but the Far East, Taiwan and Singapore, Japan and Korea. The economic growth of Japan and Korea has been produced by the way they have embraced the market, competed in international markets and exploited western technology, but rejected key elements of western liberal culture, particularly its individualism. In both societies, the state plays a more active role in promoting economic modernisation than in western Europe. Although both Korea and Japan are parliamentary democracies, they function very differently from western Europe.

In Japan, for instance, the Liberal Democratic Party has a virtual monopoly on power, which lends great stability to overall policy direction, while

'Liberalism and socialism have been like running partners, each alternately setting the pace for the other to follow'

How to keep the northern half of the planet from devouring the southern half: resources, food, health, etc. The process of eating up the poor and darker peoples will be speeded up immeasurably unless the people fight back.
Alice Walker

Now that state capitalism has collapsed, rational management of this small planet is more unlikely (even) than before. The wholesale flight from the idea of central management has been accompanied by the collapse, not only of the infrastructure necessary for the management of famine in subsistence economies, but also of literacy programmes, of commitment to rational management of agriculture and resources, and the development of the modern state. The advances made by communist governments in the northern hemisphere have been forgotten or denied before the southern world could feel the same benefits. Those who were poor, hungry, ill and illiterate before the Berlin wall fell will grow poorer, hungrier and sicker as they watch the soap operas that spread the gospel of consumerism into the meanest hovels of the urban slums into which landlessness will drive ever more of the labouring poor. Unquestioned belief in market forces will blind us to the tragedy of the defeat of the Third World.

Unless the baby is snatched from the bathwater. Unless the ideal of socialism can rise from the ashes of state monopoly. Unless Cuba can survive, and continue the politicisation of the new world. Unless Islam can shake itself out of mere reactionism and begin to act upon its original inspiration. Unless livelier civilisations than that of Europe can produce a genuine socialist philosophy and a socialist system that can adjust the inequities of distribution and consumption, without purges, without massacres and without hot and cold running war. Unless our bored and desperate children can find something to live for.

Only then will earthlings be able to hold their heads high among the other inhabitants of the galaxies.
Germaine Greer

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removing most political decisions from public scrutiny. Liberal democracy is meant to make it transparent where power lies; in Japan it is often very obscure. Japan combines a modern electronic consumer culture with elements of folklore, religion, a central role for the family and a respect for traditional hierarchies. The computer and the shrine, dynamism and tradition, go very well together.

In their moment of triumph in Europe, the western liberal democracies face an increasingly troubling global challenge to their claim to represent the best model for growth. This mounting threat from the Far East is already a major factor behind plans for a European economic and monetary union. The challenge from the Far East is almost certain to force further political and cultural changes upon Europe.

None of this means it will be easy or automatic for eastern Europe to follow a Far Eastern model. But the significance of these models in the context of developments in eastern Europe is that they show that the market economy does not tightly prescribe the kind of political institutions and cultures which can go with it. The economy sets many of our problems, but it does not prescribe solutions. In particular, collectivism, authoritarianism and a respect for traditional hierarchies can mix quite effectively with markets and modern technology. It is quite possible to imagine east European governments which are committed to market-led reforms, but are at the same time authoritarian, populist and rabidly nationalist.

The second factor is the changing role of history in providing a justification for politics. The liberal democracies seem justified in seeing themselves as the culmination of history, the representatives of progress. After all, they have come out on top. It is natural to assume that the societies of eastern Europe should grasp a liberal democratic future with both hands. Instead, it seems that a large contingent are turning back to the past.

This retreat is a much bigger blow to socialism than to liberalism. Socialism has a very tight view of how the stages of history were meant to unfold. At its most extreme, marxist historical materialism conjured up a vision of history as a giant mathematical equation, scything its way through time, eating all in its way like a huge combine harvester. Politics became an offshoot of mathematics as chance, accident and adventure were reduced to a bare minimum. It was a never-ending attempt to tidy up the world, close the last circle and tie the final knot.

Liberalism never subscribed to such a tightly ordered view of history. But it too is wedded to the idea that it means progress. The ideal of individual self-improvement, which is at the heart of liberalism, also applies to societies as a whole. Societies become more educated, tolerant, civilised and wealthy by shedding their old skins, the old-fashioned customs, cultures and political systems which held back free thought and individual initiative.

'The principles of tolerance of the civic culture look pretty anaemic beside the blood and guts of the politics of belonging'

Events in eastern Europe are clear evidence that even if we do progress through history, we do not leave our past behind; we carry it with us. The upsurge of nationalism and racism in eastern Europe shows just how hard it is to liquidate the past, even after all the coercive might of stalinism has been bent to the task. History is not a linear process in which old beliefs are completely discarded or disavowed. It is a much more halting, uncertain process of modification and improvement, reform and recidivism.

The societies of the east are both dredging up the past and looking into the future. The political cultures which emerge there are unlikely to be a simple endorsement of what already exists in the west. For these societies, progress means being able to return to the past as they step into the future.

The third challenge is over the role ideas play in guiding politics. Liberal democracy upholds the ideals of equal rights, liberty and democracy. It now faces a growing challenge, mainly in eastern Europe but increasingly in the west, from a politics inspired by blood and sweat, race and nation, loyalty to insiders and loathing of outsiders.

Liberal democracy thrives when it is combined with a civic culture. This combination is meant to create a world of tolerance and rational debate, where the right to hold a differing view is respected and the authority of government rests upon public consent delivered through the ballot box. The appeal of this civic culture helped to inspire the revolutions of 1989. The people of eastern Europe did not just take to the streets as consumers demanding the affluence of the west, they demonstrated as citizens demanding equal political rights.

Since the revolutions, however, other currents have started to run strongly which cut across the developing civic culture. The civic culture is being besieged by narrowly national, ethnic and religious cultures. The people slugging it out around Vukovar were not inspired by political ideals of a civic culture, but the raw passions of loyalty and loathing. What matters in this blood culture is the strength of your sense of belonging – to race or nation, religion or language.

The principles of tolerance of the civic culture look pretty anaemic beside the blood and guts of the politics of belonging. The abstract brotherhood of man is elusive; the brotherhood of race and nation is immediate and passionate. By offering people a neatly bounded community the politics of belonging provides them with a home, a sense of status as insiders and a convenient assembly of outsiders to blame as scapegoats. The civic culture is plural and open to outsiders. It is based upon supposedly universal ideals of liberty and democracy. The politics of belonging rests upon being closed, narrow, particular and parochial.

The likely outcome of these three challenges in eastern Europe is the creation of hybrid societies. The societies of eastern Europe will use the opening created by liberal democracy to produce different models of development. Some of the ingredients are clear. They will involve the transition to some forms of market economy and multi-party democracy, and a measure of private property. But these could be combined with other elements which do not conform to the west European liberal democratic model: highly centralised and probably authoritarian presidential power; a continuing strong economic role for the state; a resurgence of long-buried, pre-modern sources of culture and identity; political cultures influenced as much by the crude power of the politics of belonging as the tolerance of a civic culture; and a heady cocktail of racism, nationalism and religious fervour.

The development of these hybrid societies in the east cannot help but have far-reaching consequences in the west. Multi-party liberal democracy will continue to provide the dominant framework for politics in western Europe. Socialist and social democratic parties could still gain power locally and nationally. Many of the offspring of the old duopoly will still be around. But the controlling grip they exerted upon politics is weakening. They will no longer define the limits of what is politically imaginable.

European politics is being marked out by new lines of division. They will divide a politics driven by universal ideals from politics based upon particular and parochial commitments; a civic culture based on equal rights and tolerance from political cultures based on ethnicity, blood and language; cosmopolitan, mature nationalism from closed, aggressive and desperate nationalism; societies which are open and liberal towards immigrants from those which are closed and vindictive; pluralist democracy from authoritarian populism.

The contest between these different political strains will be played out in both east and west. In the east the battle is personified by the contrast between Vaclav Havel, the prime defender of the traditions of the civic culture and Lech Walesa, the bearer of brash populist nationalism. Political developments in the east are, in some ways, leading the west. Roles are being reversed. The west is no longer setting the political pace. The agenda of European politics is increasingly being set by the weird hybrid fruits being produced by the contaminated political hothouses of eastern Europe.

The way the new politics of the east is redefining the terms of politics in the west is most evident in the developing debate over European economic and political integration. On one side stand the defenders of civic culture. For them

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European integration is the best way to further the ideals of liberty, equal political rights and democracy. The aim is to create an economically stable, democratic, and open space at the heart of Europe which will anchor the region. They hope that the civic culture of tolerance and openness will set the tone of the new Europe.

On the other side stand the proponents of a closed, defensive and inward-looking Europe. They want to create a tightly-bounded community of rich societies which can keep outsiders at arms length, a new feudalism, with the rich inside the fortress and the savage warring tribes outside the city walls.

Already west European politics is becoming riven with issues of race and immigration, how best to defend national and cultural purity. Throughout Europe, anti-immigrant parties are gaining ground, from the Austrian Freedom Party to Jean Marie Le Pen's National Front in France. Anti-semitism abounds in both the richest and poorest European states, Germany and Romania. The politics of Belgium at the heart of Europe, might be a taste of what is to come. The governing coalition has been broken up by bickering between different language groups. In recent elections, the Christian democrats and socialists, the Belgian inheritors of the duopoly, lost out to the greens and Vlaams Blok, the ultra right-wing Flemish nationalist party which could control the government of Belgium's second city, Antwerp.

As Belgium suggests, politics will be much more complicated beyond the orderly world of the old duopoly. European politics will be a mosaic of different elements. Part of that mosaic will be a new progressive politics of environmentalism. But regressive nationalism and racism will also be part of the mix, emphatically so in the east, where it could command power, and as a significant minority force in the west.

What will be vital is how the shell of the formal institutions of multi-party democracy are filled out by the different political cultures of civil society. The parameters of what is possible are marked out by two possible scenarios.

The optimistic scenario is that liberal democracy will combine with a progressive politics of belonging, based upon a civic culture of tolerance and pluralism, a sense of community and public responsibility which is open and expansive, compatible with internationalism and cosmopolitanism, and a respect for different cultures and traditions.

But to bolster liberal democracy with an enlivened civic culture will require a radicalisation of its politics. If liberal democracies stand still, complacent in their superiority, they will freeze. They will be overtaken by other political currents which will more quickly fill the spaces being opened up. To unfreeze their politics they must embrace much more fully the principles of a civic culture of diversity and experimentation, pluralism and openness.

'Political developments in the east are, in some ways, leading the west. Roles are being reversed. The west is no longer setting the political pace'

The risk is that rather than carrying forward the principles of pluralism and openness, the liberal democracies will become timid and cautious, conservative and inward-looking. This will create an opportunity for a new running-mate to appear on the scene: an energetic, muscular, reactionary, authoritarian, regressive politics of belonging, based on a pride in a closed, racially pure, linguistically homogeneous and nationally aggressive sense of community. Where a civic culture would offer a community of citizens, this would offer a community of blood brothers. In a civic culture people express their national identity through their status as citizens. In a national culture they acquire their citizenship rights only as a consequence of their birth and blood ties.

With the old duopoly of liberalism and socialism losing its grip, the danger is that a new axis could emerge to define the parameters of politics; a duopoly of cautious and conservative liberal democracy at one end of the see-saw trying to control an increasingly boisterous reactionary and authoritarian populism of race and nation, blood and guts which may fill the vacancy at the other end.●

Charlie Leadbeater is industrial editor of the Financial Times.

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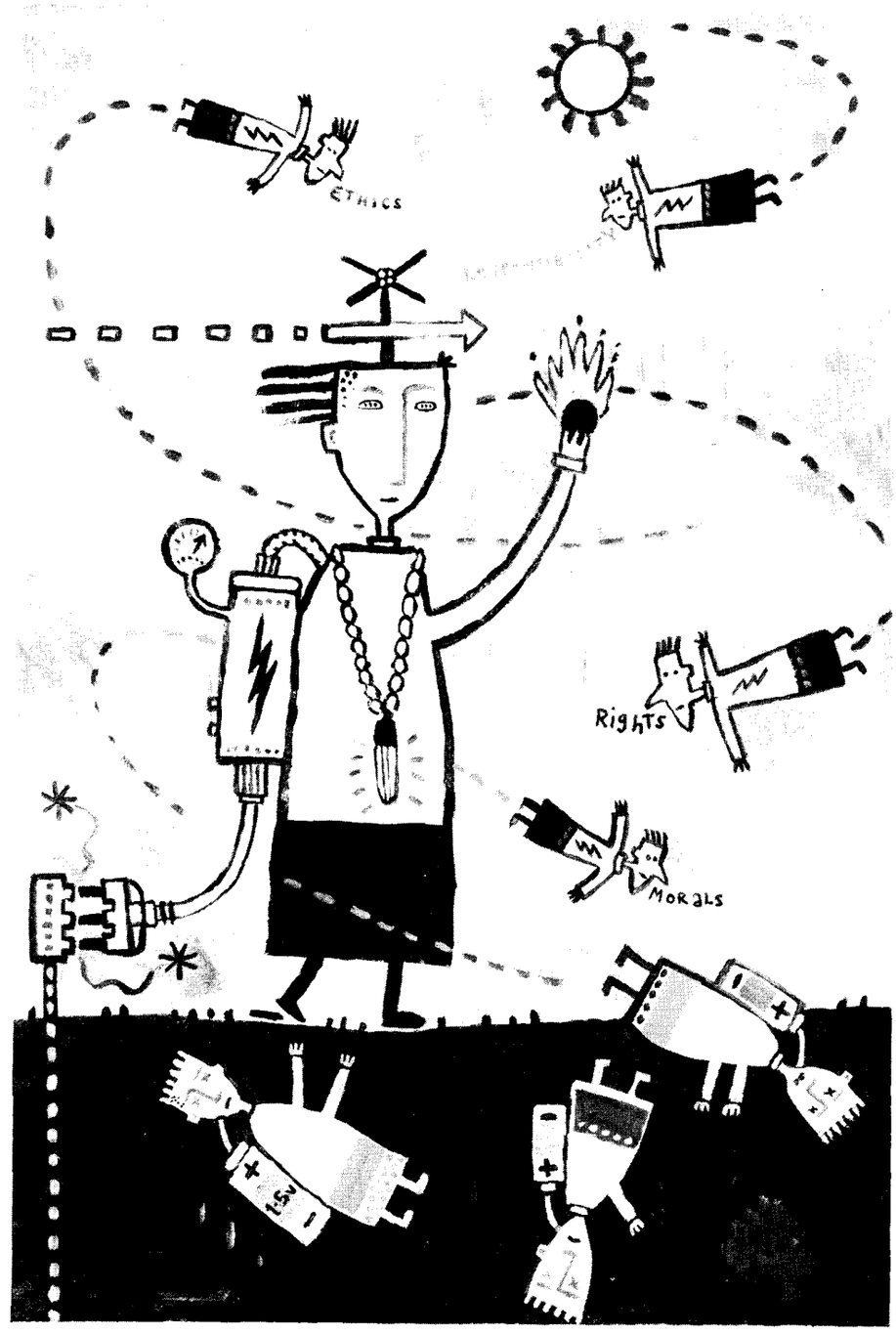

Illustration: Spike Gerrell

Is socialism on the way out? It is a question that is now frequently asked and generally answered in the affirmative. **Geoff Mulgan** thinks otherwise

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There is a sense in which politics is an endless search for energy. Those parties or movements that plug into the most powerful sources become strong. Those that find themselves running on the equivalent of old 1.5v batteries become an irrelevance.

Political energies fall into two categories. Into the first fall those powerful (if exhaustible) energies that come from the dynamic currents of a society: perhaps the confidence of a rising class or a demographic bulge. These are the political equivalents of fossil fuels, forced to the surface by seismic shifts in social structures, and available to anyone with the wit to use them. The second category covers a more renewable kind of energy: the values and insights of traditions that transcend the conditions from which they arise, the ideas that inspire and instruct across time.

For the Left, as for all political movements, the big question is always the same: how to harness the strongest new energies and how best to tap into the renewable strengths of the tradition. It is a question that has a special relevance to the last issue of a left theoretical journal, published at a time when the Left's critics are eager to prove that its energies are dissipated and that it is destined to go the way of Poujadism, anarcho-syndicalism and absolute monarchy into the dustbin of history.

This article explains why in the long run they are likely to be proved wrong, and why the values of the tradition are set to endure. But it starts with the more immediate prospects, the widespread feeling that an era when markets expanded to take advantage of decaying older structures, and when privatism and corporate assertiveness, greed and self-control all combined to make conservatism feel modern and alive, has come to an end.

Now the most powerful sources look very different. In Britain there are obvious candidates: the magnetic pull of Europe; the newly confident cities and regions, particularly in the north; the rebirth of civic activism; the environmental movements; the cult of fitness and health; manufacturing (set to rise as services retrench); rented housing (rising as owner occupation passes saturation); the 'life politics' of reproduction, survival and genetics; the beginnings of grey power (the prospect of a majority of over-50s by 2025); the continued movement of women into work and into power; rapid increases in the numbers of professionals (managers for example are expected to rise by 700,000 by 2000); Total Quality and its successors; a newly assertive Islam; inward investors bringing new ways of working; constitutional reform. You can make your own list.

Though in some ways quite random, this list marks a distinct swing away from the high modernist capitalism that dominated the 1980s. It suggests that we are entering a new phase in the parallel global advance of democracy and capitalism, that has seen them expand sometimes in sync and sometimes in direct competition. Now it looks as if we're entering a more democratic phase of the cycle, with the very dynamism of the market giving strength to countervailing movements asserting regional identity, environmental responsibility or ethical priorities.

One symptom of this shift is that capitalism's undeniable momentum is now proving as disruptive to the political coherence of the Right and Centre as it is to the Left. Look at the market's erosion of traditional values (phone sex lines, surrogate motherhood, etc) or the fracturing of the European Right as it flounders between open markets and borders on the one hand, and national reaction on the other. Or look at the profound confusion of modern Western liberalism about where it stands between minimal anti-statism and its own traditions of supporting social cohesion.

Yet, even though its competitors are in such difficulty, so apparently unsure about which energies to capture and which to reject, there is still a sense of crisis on the Left. Most of the reasons have been well-rehearsed: for example, the effects of 1989 on the marxist Left and the problems of adapting social democracy to a more integrated world economy. But I suspect that the unease also reflects something else: the very structure of the argument with which those on the Right and Centre now proclaim the death of socialism.

According to this argument, the main political energies of the modern era are largely spent. Socialism is nothing more than the obsolete and archaic symptom of conflicts that have gone cold. Just as its rise was intimately linked to the rise to prominence of the industrial working class, so will its fall be just as inevitable and irresistible. Sociology (and here the argument sidesteps the vast industrial proletariats of India, Brazil, South Africa or Korea) dictates that the very factors which raised the Left up now cast it down, leading it the way of the cloth cap, brass band and monarchies: paid lipservice for the sake of continuity, but to all intents and purposes irrelevant. Nobody will ever again announce, as the liberal Sir William Harcourt did in the 1890s, that we are all socialists now.

Perhaps the most interesting feature of this argument is that its structure is marxian. The very confidence in historical inevitability which once intimidated retreating reactionaries is now used to mesmerise and browbeat the Left. The marxists who once loved nothing better than to declare the obsolescence of their opponents, the scientific nature of their knowledge, or the irresistible social logic that would guarantee their victory, now find their own guns turned around.

It is hard to exaggerate just how ironic this turn of events is. The Right is now using the single most discredited part of the marxist structure: the claim that history is unilinear and determined, and that an era of energetic class conflict will be replaced by an era of classlessness and the 'administration of things'. These claims are now being made in the face of a century's experience that should have undermined once and for all the idea that there is any simple relation between politics, class and sociology. For we now know that there are simply too many exceptions to any rule: the peasant communist movements that 'should' have waited for the emergence of proletariats; robust conservative parties that long outlived the disappearance of traditional classes from which they grew; strong social-democratic parties in the most middle-class European countries and a weak Left in the American working class. All have shown that things are far more open, and far more a matter of history and culture, than the old theories ever allowed. As Einstein once said of politics, there are simply too many variables at work.

But the most serious flaw of these arguments is not that the world is open, but rather that it is open within consistent parameters. Against the odds, European politics (and through its remarkably successful export of ideologies, the politics of the world) continues to distil into the three great traditions of conservatism, liberalism and socialism. These may sometimes be used as little more than flags of convenience, and they may sometimes be disguised under national, religious or technocratic rhetoric. But 200 years that have changed all societies beyond recognition have not changed this underlying structure of the political cosmos.

This is not a banal observation. It would greatly surprise a visitor from 1892 that there have been no final victories or resolutions, no scientific proofs of one ideology over another; that even such a conservative society as Japan contains powerful and militant communist and socialist parties, that even as permissively liberal a culture as California sustains a moralistic and authoritarian Right, and that even as socialistic a society as Sweden is now governed by conservatives.

Why do they all survive? Two reasons stand out. One is that although politics now reaches far beyond the nation-state to embrace questions of lifestyle and sexuality, global survival and global power, no political project that has anything interesting to say about the central issues of public power can define itself except in the terms of these traditions. The role, limits and values of the state continue to be bitterly contested. No amount of experience proves the virtues of one set of answers over another. But there is also a second reason. The longevity and renewability of the great currents of political life seem to owe less to irreversible trends of political economy, than to their ability to feed off fundamental experiences of

'The marxists who once loved nothing better than to declare the obsolescence of their opponents now find their own guns turned around'

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human life, to offer enduring insights into human and social nature, and to articulate enduring fears and hopes that resonate within any modern society. They survive because what they say has a universal relevance, and because, for this very reason, their competitors are never able to achieve a permament hegemony.

Each tradition offers distinctive solutions to enduring problems. One concerns the legitimate role of the state. Where conservatism has emphasised the role of the state as guarantor of order and continuity, liberalism its minimal role in sustaining the conditions for individual freedom, socialism has always seen the state as a medium for a more moral society and for the liberation of individual potential.

A second concerns the relationship of the individual to the community. Where conservatism sees the community weighing down as a restraint on unreliable human nature, and where liberalism rests on the self contained individual and sees the community as nothing more than an aggregation of individuals, the socialist tradition has always seen the community as something positive and enabling.

A third is about fear. Where conservatism has always tended to play on fears of change and disorder, and liberalism on fears of the state, socialism has always gained its strength from the universality of fears of economic insecurity and oppression. A fourth concerns equality. Traditional conservatism has tended to emphasise the natural origins of inequality, liberalism the virtues of equality of opportunity, and socialism the importance of more equal outcomes.

These clusters of principles may at certain times have only a tenuous link to the programmes of parties that call themselves conservative, liberal or socialist. Electoral realities rarely permit ideological purity. They may be mixed and matched in more or less convincing combinations. But it is next to impossible to construct a political programme that doesn't draw from one or all of these traditions. Look, for example, at the only recent challenger to socialism, the green movement. On one level, issues like global warming have created a new kind of politics, linking intergovernmental decisions, personal lifestyle choices and politically imposed limits on the market. Yet on another level, whenever they have come close to real influence, the greens have found themselves divided on traditional lines: between reactionaries, libertarians and communitarians, or between those who would use market forces and those who would simply assert what they believe to be right.

Why then does the balance between the traditions shift? External factors are of course important. Economic crisis and war tend to weaken liberalism, for example, peace and prosperity to strengthen it. But even without such exogenous pressures, the weaknesses of any tradition that becomes too dominant soon create countervailing tendencies: symptoms of failure, moral dissatisfaction, and loss of balance. The experience of industrial societies suggests, in other words, that feedback mechanisms tend to move politics through cycles of progress and reaction, public action and privatism, with each turn of the wheel giving new strengths to one or other of the traditions.

'Things are far more open, and far more a matter of history and culture, than the old theories ever allowed; there are simply too many variables at work'

Through these cycles, however, the traditions remain resistant to the rules of proof that apply to other kinds of knowledge. Belief in the sociability of human nature, for example, can be neither proved nor disproved (despite the attempts of many of the Left, such as Noam Chomsky, to prove the genetically innate nature of human sociability and morality, and contrary attempts to prove that people are nasty, selfish or violent). Moreover you can only test moral beliefs about what life (or humanity) is for, by seeing whether they are useful, not by whether they meet some objective standard of proof.

The only types of political knowledge that can be tested are the concrete forms which ideas take. These can be irretrievably discredited. Monetarism in the first world, central planning in the second and import substitution strategies in the Third World are obvious examples. The important point, however, is that their failures are not fatal to the traditions from which they come, but are more like childhood illnesses: unpleasant and temporarily debilitating, but ultimately strengthening.

This resilience is the key to the persistence of old traditions. But, ironically, this has often been one of the Left's worst blind spots. Marxism, for example, preferred progression to resilience. If you believe in the strictly progressive character of history, old ideas are by definition obsolescent, and ideas produced by one kind of society lose their relevance to another. As in the mechanistic world-view of the 19th century, 'all energies are subject to the Second Law of Thermodynamics' principle of irreversible exhaustion.

There can be no denying the power of this insight. Political discourse does change irreversibly and social realities do shape the character of political argument. But the insight is at best partial, and at worst destructive. Within the Left it often bred contempt for those early years when socialism came out of non-conformism, millenarianism, radical economics and trade unionism, as a bubbling cauldron of arguments, running the gamut from Christian utopianism, through workerist syndicalism to progressive reformism. Such a rejection of an unscientific past was a handy tool for vilifying those, like William Morris, who made of socialism 'an all-embracing theory of life...' with 'an ethic and religion of its own': an answer to the question of how to live.

As a result, much that was best in the tradition was cast out, so that it is only now possible to see that the Left's history is less a progression from idealism to science and from naivete to rigour, than a steady accretion of different modes of thought, many of which retain their relevance even when their original causes disappear. Some of the Chartist arguments, for example, are almost indistinguishable from constitutionalist arguments made 150 years later. Many of the ideas of the ethical socialists achieve a new resonance in a world where global survival depends on ethics and personal responsibilty getting the better of self-interest. And even guild socialism gains new relevance as more occupations seek the identity of a craft or profession, in control of their skills and their ethos. 150 years (roughly two consecutive lifetimes) since the word 'socialism' first came into use in Britain, the tradition is far from dead. It remains a ready source of energy.

Where there has been a change in recent years has been in our understanding of the difference between the enduring values of socialism, values which long predate its parties and movements, and the forms it took as it came to power at the high point of industrial society. It is now much easier to see just how much the Left was shaped by taking power just when bureaucratic, rational, mass organisation was at its most dynamic.

The deficiencies of that era of national state socialism which began at the end of the first world war – a tendency to favour top-heavy and bureaucratic structures, devoid of any means to balance the state's own vested interests – are now beyond dispute. But what is less often noticed is the extent to which at that time the Left sold short its own tradition and underestimated the importance of the ethical foundations on which the movement was built. By internalising the determinist self-image of industrial society, it deceived itself into believing that it was a scientific movement of inevitable progress, rather than a carrier of enduring and primarily ethical ideals about how people should live and how societies can best cohere.

The long-overdue death of communism makes this clearer. It reveals once again the long pedigree, the breadth, depth and vitality of the left tradition. And it confirms that despite the brilliant analyses of marxist thinkers like Gramsci and Luxemburg, communism generated no real insights about how societies should be organised that were superior to those of the broader socialist tradition and the humanist and democratic currents from which both evolved. In every case where it offered a new rule for social organisation, the new turned out to be wrong.

The history of schism is at an end, and the Left is now a broader church – possibly less coherent but certainly less divided. With the old divisions gone, and the renewable energy sources and the

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strengths of the tradition clearly intact, the question now moves forward. What will turn out to be the great new energies of our times, the new sources the Left will need to tap? Four look like having the greatest long-term potential.

Far and away the most important is the still-sweeping movement of democracy across the world, from China to Brazil, Kazakhstan to Turkey. This movement, still in historical terms in its infancy, remains full of potential for the Left because it is never only about procedures, but is also always about the justice of outcomes, the rights and wrongs of how people are treated. That is why, once unleashed, the energies of a democratic culture tend to be restlessly ethical and emotive, always throwing up new challenges to those in power. This is true even in Britain, one of the first parliamentary democracies, where a feeling that the light of democracy has still to shine into the dense webs of privilege and class that shape so many of our institutions, is likely to fuel one of the main movements for change in the 1990s.

The second, and closely related, source of new energy is the transition towards an era of human capital. The shift from merchant to industrial capital, and more recently to finance capital, is now on the edge of another epochal shift towards human capital: the resources of skill, ingenuity and creativity. This shift is taking place in the very heart of capitalist organisation, yet resonates remarkably well with old ideas of co-operation and the rights of the producer to control over his or her work. For the Left it means that there is a new chance to complete the unfinished business of bringing democracy into economic life: not, as before, as a fetter on capitalism, but rather as a way of removing the barriers to its future development.

'The role, limits and values of the state continue to be bitterly contested. No amount of experience proves the virtues of one set of answers over another'

The third source of energy is the continued expansion of demands on states, public bodies and transnational organisations to extend their responsibility. Despite a decade of apparent retreat, the long history of expansion which gave the Left such momentum earlier in the century has not been arrested. If anything, the shift towards more devolved operations and public powers at one remove from the state has cleared the way for a new period of advance. The sheer intensity of a packed planet that makes individualism attractive also makes collectivism necessary.

The fourth set of energies is less immediately tangible but none the less important for that. The predictions of Marx, Keynes and others of a world beyond scarcity may have been premature but they were not necessarily wrong. In the prosperous societies of the First World, consumption looks unlikely to prove a very secure foundation for identity and self-realisation. People inevitably look elsewhere: to their work, the communities in which they live, and the needs of the planet as a whole. As a result there are already signs that the political world is set to move beyond the emancipatory imperatives on which socialism and liberalism often found common ground towards more difficult (and inspiring) questions about how to live.

With life expectancy now 35 years longer than at the beginning of the century, it is probably inevitable that people will take a more responsible and long-term view than they once did. Politics may indeed lose something of its youthful passion. But it is not likely to be in any way less concerned with questions of judgement and ethics. It seems more likely that the teenage scribblers who for 200 years have feverishly declared the end of history, ideology, capitalism, God and now socialism, will go out of fashion, leaving the rest of us with the enduring questions: how to balance the needs of the individual and society; how to define the limits and responsibilities of the state; and how to define the nature of right and wrong in public life. For the Left it will be an ability to offer a distinctive, relevant and enduring set of answers to these questions, and not any monopoly of scientific truth, that will guarantee a place at the heart of political life. That is the unsung legacy of 1989, and one of the real causes for celebration.●

Geoff Mulgan is author of Communication And Control (Polity Press)

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God Only Knows

Ernesto Laclau discusses why marxism as a system of thought is outmoded

In a *Marxism Today* seminar which I attended some months ago, a document setting the agenda of the discussion asserted: 'The end of a notion of some logic to history gives greater weight to ideology and ethics in constituting radical politics'.

I do not entirely disagree with that formulation, but I would argue that it is ambiguous, because it can involve two entirely different assertions. The first is that political identities, in the fragmented world of present-day societies, are far more complex than anything that the traditional Left has previously imagined. This is only too true. But its meaning can also be constructed in terms of a subtle and perverse dialectic of replacement – that the classical logics of history should be replaced by something else which would occupy the same structural place as these logics.

Let us just consider the debate about whether the working class is still the main historical subject or if the latter's role has passed to the new social movements. I would argue that this way of formulating the problem is still imprisoned by the old approach which it attempts to supersede, because it maintains the idea that there has to be a *single* privileged agent of historical change, defined by a historical and social totality which can be rationally grasped. But it is precisely this last assumption which has to be questioned, and, if one does so, the whole discussion over who is the privileged agent of historical change becomes meaningless.

It is convenient to pause here for a moment, because this notion of a radical intelligibility of the social, which assigns a precise location to all its partial internal processes, is one of the main obstacles to the understanding of the nature of contemporary social struggles and their political consequences. We have to remember that the idea that history and society could be referred back to an ultimate rational ground which explains the totality of its processes is a relatively new one. This imperialism of 'reason' was absent from ancient and medieval thought, only starting to affirm itself at the beginning of modern times.

I would even add something: this all-embracing role of reason is the distinctive mark of modernity, and it resulted from the conflation of the notion of reason, as elaborated by classical antiquity, and the Christian notion of an eschatological representation of the totality of the real. Ancient philosophy did not assert that rationality can exhaust with its categories the totality of the real. Aristotle, for instance, distinguished between *form*, which is the rational universal inscribed in all existing things, and *matter*, the purely contingent and accidental which escapes the grasp of rationality. Even Plato's 'demiurge' did not create the world out of nothingness, but imprinted the eternal forms in a pre-existing matter. So, the ambition of modern thought, to explain the totality of what exists in terms of an ultimate rational ground, is something profoundly alien to ancient culture.

On the contrary, the idea that the totality of what exists can be explained from a single ground is a distinctive trait of Christianity, in which the creation is a creation out of nothingness, and God is the absolute source of all existing things. This absolute ground is certainly not 'rational' from the point of view of human reason, because the ways of the Lord are inscrutable, but we have an eschatological picture of the future of cosmic dimensions through revelation. In this way, Christianity introduced two notions which were crucial for the constitution of the modern outlook: the idea of an absolute source of everything that exists, and the assertion that there is a necessary sequence in the course of future events which we know through revelation. The notion of a 'necessary logic of history' first emerged in theological garb.

At the beginning of modern times, with the eclipse of God, a significant shift in this intellectual paradigm was to take place. Modernity retained from the Christian vision both the affirmation of an absolute ground of the real, and the aspiration to a total representability of history as a necessary sequence of events. The only difficulty was that, since God was no longer available, both the ground and the necessary succession have to be explained by principles internal to the world, and in this way reason is called to play a far more fundamental role than it ever did in the past.

Modern rationalism, from Descartes to Spinoza and from Hegel to Marx, is characterised by this new pretension of subsuming the totality of the real under a unified system of categories. Hegel's assertion that everything which is real is rational is the highest expression of an intellectual trend which penetrates and dominates the totality of modern thought. Marx's 'deter-

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mination *in the ultimate instance* by the economy', and the '*necessary* laws of history' are not far away.

It is this tendency to think in terms of 'ultimate grounds' and closed totalities which survives today in many discussions – like those concerning the new social movements – even when marxism is, at least formally, in question. The tendency is to abandon the actual content of marxist categories while maintaining the formal structural locations which that content occupied in a rationalist scheme, which thereby is not questioned in the least. It is accepted that the working class cannot play the eschatological function attributed to it by marxism; but this is immediately followed by the search for a new revolutionary actor – students, women, the masses of the Third World – without realising that the crisis of the eschatological representation of history renders meaningless the whole notion of a 'revolutionary actor' in its traditional sense.

Let us go back, for a moment, to the Middle Ages. We have said that, from the point of view of human reason, the succession of events in the eschatological series is contingent and irrational, only known through revelation. Modern thought occupied that eschatological terrain, making reason play the role of a secularised God. But if we are today moving away from all eschatology – either of a theological or a secularised kind – we are only left with the radical contingency of history and society, with a plurality of historical processes and events; and these do not lead back to an ultimate ground which would fix their meaning once and for all.

This does not imply, of course, that social life is a meaningless ensemble of chaotic events. What it *does* imply is that, whatever meaning historical events have, this meaning is pragmatically and hegemonically constructed through social struggles; it is always going to be precarious and threatened by opposite tendencies and, consequently, there is no 'objective meaning' out of which all historical events could be explained according to a unified scheme. It is my contention that this new intellectual condition of our postmodern age, far from being the occasion for any nostalgia for the lost ground, should be the source of a new optimism. For the blurring of the 'certainties of history' allows us to advance democratic causes in a far more consistent manner than in the past. It is this which I will try to demonstrate in the rest of this article, exploring some of the dimensions and democratic possibilities which follow from social contingency.

Inherent to modern secularised eschatologies is the assertion that social emancipation is going to be the historical achievement of a 'universal class' – that is, of a social agent representing pure human essence, dispossessed of all differential specificity. Proletarians do not have a motherland. For marxism, the genesis of a universal class was conceived precisely as a process involving the destruction and cancellation of all particularisms and social differences. The simplification of social structures under capitalism would lead to an increasing proletarianisation and to a final confrontation between the bourgeoisie and the vast masses of the dispossessed.

A very important difference between Christian eschatologies and their secularised versions should be pointed out here: while in religious eschatologies the saviour of humanity – who belonged to a supernatural order – could only act historically by incarnating himself in a limited and finite body, for classical marxism the proletariat as a universal class was the product of history itself and in that sense it did not require any incarnation. But very quickly, the dialectic of incarnation imposed itself onto marxism. The gap between the actual consciousness of the workers and the universal task which they were supposed to fulfil was expressed in a split between what was called the 'materiality of the class' and its historical interests, which were to be incarnated by the party. But, capitalist society, far from moving in the direction of an increasing social homogenisation, is, on the contrary, dominated by a proliferation of particularisms and differences, and therefore the gap between concrete agents and universal tasks steadily widened. Under these conditions, the logic of incarnation had to be increasingly used in all attempts to make political action compatible with marxist eschatology.

Now, a relation of incarnation presupposes that there is an insurmountable chasm between what is incarnated and the body in which the incarnation takes place. A limited historical actor has been attributed a limitless historical task. The insurmountability of the gap between task and body was bridged in religious discourse by a divine decision; but in the case of a secular incarnation, the attribution of the task can only be a self-attribution. The totalitarian character of this operation is clear; a certain historical actor does not speak from his own limited position, but claims that his position is the locus of the universal. He does not establish a dialogue with other, equally limited historical actors in order to construct a collective will, but asserts, on the contrary, that his discourse is the only valid one, and claims to have a knowledge that all the others will *necessarily* disappear.

It is important to realise that this totalitarian tendency would not have emerged if industrial societies had actually evolved in the direction of an increasing homogenisation of the social structure; for in that case, everybody would have spoken from the same location, universality would have been an actual social fact, and no incarnation would have been necessary. But when these societies evolved in the opposite direction and became increasingly fragmented and dominated by all kinds of particularisms, the totalitarian dangers of the universalistic discourse became only too visible.

So, what makes the rationalistic discourse of the 'ultimate instance of the social' and the 'logic of history' totalitarian is their denial of particularism and difference. But this already shows that the condition for the deepening of the democratic process is a dispersal of power through a proliferation of differences. Instead of the universal task of a privileged historical actor, there is an increasing plurality of social agents who construct their demands from particular viewpoints, none of whom can claim to represent humanity as such. Whatever more universal values exist in a certain community will not be the expression of any pre-existing essence, but rather the result of a pragmatic and unstable construction which starts from a multiplicity of points on the social fabric. The eclipse of the rational ground of history – in which, as we have seen, marxism, along with the whole of modernity, believed – and the increasing fragmentation of present-day societies, are thus the preconditions for an advance in a democratic direction.

Let us not, however, paint a too rosy picture. For if universalism does not necessarily lead in a democratic direction, particularism does not do so either. The assertion of differential identities can be done in terms of an exclusionary discourse which can easily lead into all kinds of intransigency and xenophobia. There is actually no particularistic identity – even the apparently more libertarian – which cannot be constructed in these anti-democratic terms. The reasons for this are clear. Particularism means the construction of a social identity around an issue or a specific geographical, ethnic, sexual or social location. Now, given that there is no longer any rational ground ensuring a necessary articulation between the various identities of the participating social agents, no guarantee exists that the assertion of one identity, which we would consider as democratic, would necessarily be linked to others which we would consider equally so. All kinds of combinations are possible here. Just a superficial glance at the world scene would be enough to convince us of that.

The crisis of the communist regimes in the Eastern bloc is a good example of what I am saying. In one sense they certainly represent the collapse of eschatological universalism. The world of the Internationals, the assertion of a human and socialist identity against and beyond all particularisms, have culminated, with the history of communism in the 20th century, in a tragedy whose epic dimensions are proportionate to its ambitions. What we have called the dialectic of incarnation found its full development in communist totalitarianism. The insurmountable gap

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between the universality of the task and the limited and finite body incarnating it found its logical conclusion in the revenge of the body, which asserted its particular identity through the corruption of a bureaucracy, through massive repression in the name of human freedom, through the denial of civil rights in the name of emancipation, through inefficiency and waste in the name of rational planning.

But in a second sense we are starting to see today that the assertion of particularism, which in eastern Europe is becoming the substitute for the universalistic chimera, is showing us a spectacle which is far from appetising: ethnic confrontation between communities, xenophobia, anti-semitism, and the resurgence of all kinds of traditional and obscurantist identifications. This is not the whole panorama, and certainly there are also trends in eastern European societies which are moving in a democratic direction, but the negative phenomena are massive enough to require us to pause a moment to reflect on their meaning.

My answer is broadly the following: the absence of a ground of the social means that whatever form of social articulation exists is going to be the result of a laborious process of political construction, which creates new habits, new forms of thought, new forms of relation between people. In other words, it means the creation of a political tradition. But this is precisely what an authoritarian regime makes impossible. So its sudden overthrow does not bring to the fore a fully-fledged democratic alternative, but rather liberates forces which have had no time to learn how to constitute a democratic community. In these circumstances, people tend to assert their immediate, particular identities as the only thing they have, in order to find points of reference in a new and disorientating political landscape. This is why the sudden collapse of an authoritarian regime is generally followed by a period of anarchy and civil unrest. The French revolution and the early stages of the Hispano-American republics in the 19th century are good examples of this. And the events in eastern Europe and the complex process of the South African transition towards a post-apartheid society show the same phenomenon in our time.

So, if neither universalism nor particularism are by themselves capable of ensuring the path towards a democratic society, what would? Is democracy, perhaps, a utopian dream, to be destroyed by the exclusionary alternative between totalitarian universalism and anarchic particularism? My answer is that the political games which one can play are not exhausted by referring to the extreme situations that these two poles represent. The gap between the limitation and particularism of *all* social agents and the need for a force which acts in the name of the whole community can certainly not be bridged, but that is precisely what makes democracy possible. For if the gap *were* bridged, one particular segment of society would have become, once and forever, the pure incarnation of the community's universality.

'Political identities, in the fragmented world of present-day societies, are far more complex than anything that the traditional Left has previously imagined'

But if the gap cannot be bridged, any incarnation is going to be purely temporary, and this opens up the possibility of an alternation of different groups in power. A ground of the social is needed in order to give to society a certain image, shape and orientation. But since, at the same time, that ground is ultimately impossible, it cannot acquire the character of an absolute foundation, as it can only exist in the precarious form of a hegemonic construction which constantly shows the traces of its transient character. This is the way in which democracy – the greatest political creation of the last two centuries – tries to mediate between universalism and particularism. If the rationalism of modernity, with its ambition of controlling the ground of society, left us the poisoned gift of an unresolved tension between universalism and particularism, the post-modern renunciation of such a ground opens the way to a mediation between the two and, in this sense, makes possible the development of the full potential of the democratic revolution.●

Ernesto Laclau is the director of the centre for theoretical studies at Essex University.

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Guide to The Class Of *Marxism Today* (see pp36-7)

First Row: (from left to right) Pat Phoenix, *Coronation Street*'s **Elsie Tanner** (interview, Oct 1984); **Paddy Ashdown** (interview, Dec 1990); **David Jenkins**, Bishop of Durham (interview, Oct 1984); **Chris Patten** (interview, Feb 1991); **Suzanne Moore** (columnist); **Alexei Sayle** (interview, June 1983); **Sir John Harvey-Jones** (interview, Nov 1991); **Richard Rogers**, architect of the Pompidou Centre (interview, Feb 1989; article, March 1989); **Simon Bates**, Radio One DJ (interview, July 1988); **Derek Jarman**, film director (interview, Feb 1990); **Michael Heseltine** (interview, March 1988); **Reggie Kray** (article, Feb 1989)

Second Row: **Alice Walker** (interview, Oct 1989); **Melvyn Bragg** (article, July 1982); **Bob Geldof** (interviews, Jan 1987, August 1991); **Fred Halliday** (frequent contributor); **Göran Therborn** (frequent contributor); **Teresa Gorman**, Conservative MP (roundtable discussion, Jan 1988); **Bryan Gould** (interview, June 1987, roundtable Oct 1988); **David Owen** (contributor, March 1983) **Betty Matthews** (member of the editorial board and devoted supporter); **Monty Johnstone** (regular author and interviewer); **Arthur Miller** (interview, Jan 1989); **Arthur Scargill** (interview, March 1981)

Third Row: **Denis Healey** (interviews, April 1986, March 1991: article, Dec 1986); **Nigel Mansell**, leading Grand Prix driver (interview, Nov 1986); **David Marquand** (regular author); **Antonio Gramsci** (*Marxism Today*'s patron saint); **Eric Hobsbawm** (one of the *MT* greats) **Martin Jacques** (editor of said journal); **Margaret Thatcher** (*Marxism Today*'s other patron saint); **Stuart Hall** (the other *MT* great); **Beatrix Campbell** (what can we say, where would we have been without her?); **Neal Ascherson** (regular author); **Maya Angelou** (interview, Sept 1987); **Linford Christie**, Britain's leading sprinter (interview, Sept 1988)

Fourth Row: **Fay Weldon** (articles, Aug 1986, Oct 1990); **Neil Kinnock** (interviews, June 1983, October 1984); **Victoria Wood** (interview, Nov 1986); **Andrew Gamble** (regular author); **Charlie Leadbeater** (regular author, New Times man); **Geoff Mulgan** (regular author, the other New Times man); **Robin Murray** (Mr Post-Fordism); **David Edgar** (regular author); **Doreen Massey** (regular author); **Sarah Benton** (regular author and columnist); **Bob Rowthorn** (regular author); **Jesse Jackson** (interview, March 1986)

Fifth Row: **Lech Walesa** (interview, Oct 1981); **Joe Slovo**, leading figure in ANC and general secretary of South African Communist Party (interviews, Dec 1986, March 1990); **Ken Livingstone** (several interviews and article); **Clare Short** (roundtable, July 1990); **Angela Carter** (interview, July 1991); **Salman Rushdie** (interview, Sept 1983); **Julie Burchill** (article, Aug 1988) **Edwina Currie** (interview, March 1987); **Tony Benn** (several interviews and articles); **John Major** (contributor, Jan 1989); **David Puttnam** (interview, Feb 1982); **Edward Heath** (interview, Nov 1988)

(With apologies to those who should be here but aren't)

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(with thanks to David Edgar and Chris Granlund)
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Published by
Marxism Today Ltd
6-9 Cynthia Street,
London N1 9JF

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Marxism Today
ISBN 0026-4118
ISSN 0025-4118
Volume 35 Number 12

Distribution
Newstrade
Comag,
Tavistock Road,
West Drayton,
Middx UB7 7QE
Bookshops
Central Books Ltd,
99 Wallis Road,
London E9 5LN
Subscriptions
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Quadrant,
Oakfield House,
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Typeset
Marxism Today
Spencers
Printed
BPCC, Colchester

ABC
Member of the Audit Bureau of Circulations

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Karl Marx is dead.

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In Memoriam

The last issue of *Marxism Today* is dedicated to my mum, Dorothy Jacques, who died on May 28, 1989. She loved *MT*, just like I did, and was a constant source of inspiration and support. I miss her terribly. Martin

We would like to thank all the people who over the years have worked on *Marxism Today* and made it all possible (present staff excluded): Sally Townsend, Paul Webster, Mark Perryman, Jane Taylor, Sally Davison, Paddy Farrington, Peter Hammarling, Lee Robinson, Dave Grant, Katherine Gutkind, Chris Granlund, Martin Pople, Tracey Brabin, Keith Ablitt, Andrew Hartley, Kay Ball, Mary Braithwaite, Mike Lackerstein, Philippa Langton, Maria Loftus, Maggie Martin, Kevin Berry, James Collard, Gordon Guthrie, Gary Bell, Kate Melvin, Morrie Rose, Mark Platt, Natasha Finlayson, Martin Robinson, Jenni Moore, Caroline Harris, Rod Laver, Malcolm Clark, Lavinia Kennett, Trudie Cooke, Diane Dixon, Sally Beardsley, Dave Triesman, Paul Marginson, Jon Chadwick, Tom Lonergan, Chrissie Charlton, Nick Mirzoeff, Patricia Dobson, Rowena Chapman, John Kelly, Melanie Cooke, Dave Kitson, Paul Olive, Sue Lamble, Mary-Jane Bogue, Jane Critchley, Apala Chowdhury, Tracey Bass, Iain Bennett, Martin Deeson, Abigail Fletcher, Tim Middleton, Mike Potter, Chris Pate, Jo Newman, Richard Hill, Minnie Bowles, Abdul Kassim, Mike Jones, Peter Higgins, Neil Bellis, Peter Chapman, John Ball, Joanna Sumner, Miriam Rivett, Gill Jacobs, Phoebe Cresswell-Evans, Derek Freeman, Dan Glaister, Radhika Holmstrom, Anya Schiffrin, and many more.

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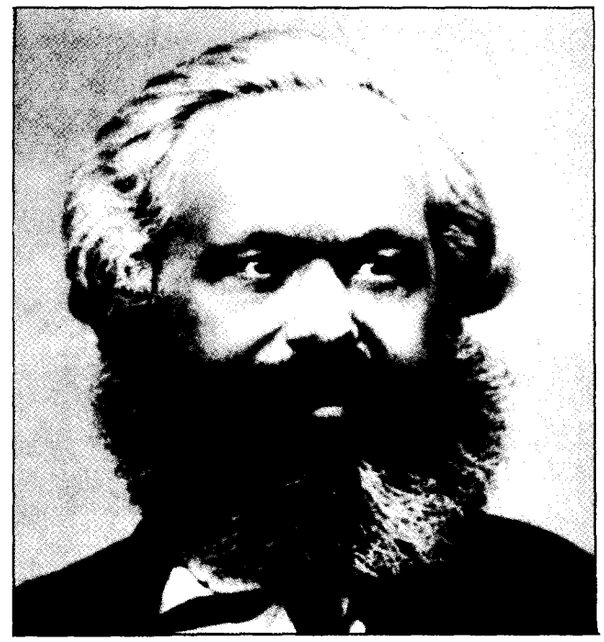
Karl Marx



Born in Trier in 1818, Karl Marx studied law before taking a doctorate in philosophy. Although he originally made his name as a radical journalist and editor, he is principally known for his best-selling books, of which *Manifesto Of The Communist Party* (co-written with Frederick Engels, a freelance author and successful businessman) and *Capital* are probably the most famous, appearing on many reading lists for political studies courses. Having been expelled from many European countries, he is now permanently resident in London with his wife Jenny. His hobbies include attending workers' meetings and exposing the laws of motion of society.

What animal best characterises you, and why? An old mole. See innumerable gnomic references.

What is your favourite piece of architecture? The Lloyds Building. It exposes the internal workings of the system so effectively.

What was your first thought this morning? *Damned* revisionists.

How do you want your children to resemble/differ from you? I only hope they don't turn so bolshie in adolescence.

Do you believe in a god, or any form of religion? Didn't I ever tell you the one about the opium and the masses?

You're driving through a hot, desolate expanse. What's playing on the stereo? What am I driving?

Under what circumstances would you use private medicine? Don't ask this question of a poor man with haemorrhoids and pulmonary abscesses. (I might ask Frederick for a bit extra.)

Would you like to alter anything about your appearance? My wife does keep saying I need a haircut.

What talent would you most like to have? Conciliation.

Do you pay your poll tax? No – Frederick pays it for me.

Who do you most respect? Martin Jacques. I'd never have thought of interviewing all those Tory politicians for the magazine, but in retrospect it worked.

What is your favourite joke? 'The world revolution will begin in Russia'.

Which thinker has had most effect on your own personal philosophy? Anyone I can revise.

What is your most irritating personal habit? Critiquing other people's programmes.

Do you give to charities? You don't catch me papering over the cracks of capitalism.

Do you believe Page 3 should be banned? I was discussing this with the maid just the other day – I persuaded her that there was nothing wrong with a bit of slap and tickle.

Who would you most like to change places with? Jim Morrison. Père Lachaise seems much more fun than Highgate cemetery.

Complete this sentence: If I were dictator for a day... Pretty obvious stuff – I'd unite the workers of the world, expose capitalism's internal contradictions, and get to meet Madonna.

What is the largest amount of money you've spent on clothes? Everyone lies when answering this question, so I'm not going to add to it.

Where is your favourite holiday destination? The next spa I visit to take a cure. (The abscesses again.)

What are your addictions? Prefacing things.

Do you enjoy playing games? I used to play draughts with Lenin. He always wanted to play chess, but I couldn't match his sense of strategy and tactics.

Which politician do you find least unattractive? It may be very politically incorrect, but Mrs Thatcher does have quite a sexy gleam in her eye...

Which frivolous newspapers or magazines do you take? I browse through the lifestyle section of *Der Sozialdemocrat* over lunch at the British Museum.

Who does the cleaning where you live? I'm not sure I know, but Frederick wrote a little pamphlet about it once.

Which is your favourite meeting place? Anywhere with three exits.

What part of this life would you take into another life? Circular libraries.

What do you now own that you had never dreamt of owning? A workers' International.

Which film star do you dream about? The pram in *Battleship Potemkin*.

Which is your favourite city? I've been banned from most of them.

Are you a thinker or a doer? I'd need more time to consider that.

What do you think is the worst job in the world? Working for a magazine called *Marxism Today* in 1991.

What do you no longer believe in? Ghosts. Especially the spectres haunting Europe.

What hi-tech device scares you? The wordprocessor. It's a gift to the revisionists.

How do you want to have changed by the end of the millennium? I want to be the subject of nostalgia.

What's your darkest fear? That all that is solid will stay solid.

Did you enjoy completing this questionnaire? It's nice to have the last word for a change. But I found it very alienating to have to write in such short sentences.●

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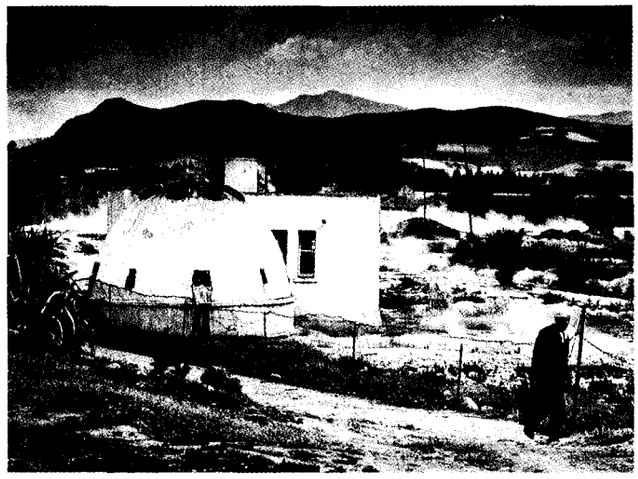

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